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THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER . . .

WHEN science fiction came of age the bug-eyed monster, despite a proud heritage stretching back through H. G. Wells and Jules Verne to Apuleius, was quietly given his walking papers. When he protested strenuously he was informed that he couldn't possibly exist anywhere in time or space. "No, my friend," we said. "You are an illusion of the first magnitude. You are juvenile and passe and on a par with the ghoulish apparitions that once stalked—with what now seems to us a wholly unconvincing clanking of chains—through the Gothic Romances of Horace Walpole and old Mrs. Radcliffe. You are out of the picture—oh, but definitely."

Did we do him an injustice? Did he merit such abuse? Possibly. But before we make up our minds suppose we try to bring the picture into sharper focus. Precisely what *is* a bug-eyed monster in a strictly speculative sense? Isn't he simply Mr. Jones or Mr. Peffington transferred to another dimension of unreason, another climate of the mind entirely at variance with our own? Aren't human beings as we know them quite as terrifying and mysterious in all respects — even to themselves?

To a modern physicist or even a modern biochemist Man himself is the great enigma, and when Eddington assures us that the picture of the physical world conveyed to us by our five senses does not accurately depict the true nature of reality, isn't he saying, in effect, that we may all be bug-eyed monsters?

Suppose that an inhabitant of another planet far out across the great curve of the universe could see us as we *really* are, with all of those visual-aid misconceptions stripped away. Remember—our eyes and ears and sense of touch deceive us. We can never know what we're really like in the fourth-dimensional—or seventh-dimensional!—prism of ultimate reality. If we occasionally frighten ourselves *even now* by a depth-beyond-depth mysteriousness within ourselves what might we not do to an alien entity with multi-dimensional organs of perception?

The answer is brought forcibly home to us in this month's most imaginative cover illustration. Miss X, a perfectly well-adjusted blonde Earthwoman, has emerged from Spaceship Y, and is entering a cave on an alien planet. She has heard an ominous crackling sound behind her, but she hasn't seen the "monster" yet.

When she does see him she will probably turn a sickly shade of green. She may even pass out from shock. But the monster doesn't even know what a woman looks like—a major calamity in itself. Can you imagine how *he* will feel? When he sees her as she really is—but perhaps we'd better leave that to your imagination!

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FRANK BELKNAP LONG

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Isaac Newton

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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Paul Harvey Hails New Way For Deaf To Hear Clearly Again

NEW YORK CITY (Special)—A sensational new discovery in the miracle science of electronics that helps the hard-of-hearing hear clearly again was hailed by Paul Harvey, famous news commentator, on his American Broadcasting Co. broadcast Sunday night.

Harvey revealed that this new discovery helps even those suffering a severe hearing loss to hear again with unbelievable clearness. It is so revolutionary it makes vacuum-tube hearing aids obsolete. Nothing shows in the ear except a tiny, almost invisible device.

"This new invention changes the lives of the hard-of-hearing overnight," Harvey said. "I've seen it happen to someone I know intimately."

Harvey urged his listeners to find out how this amazing discovery can bring new happiness and success to their loved ones who need better hearing.

To acquaint readers of this magazine with this new way to hear clearly again, a fascinating book with complete facts will be sent free, in a plain wrapper. No cost or obligation. Send your request on a postcard to Electronic Research Director, Dept. FU-6, Beltone Hearing Aid Co., 400 Madison Avenue, New York 17, New York.

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the mechanical man

by . . . Algis Budrys

Yancey's arrogance made him despise the tragic weakness of other men. But in space all men are strangers to themselves.

LATER, Yancey was to picture it in his mind's eye, imagining the yellow rose of fire that suddenly bloomed across the fissured plains, and the distant peaks flashing into bloody reflection—a shark's mouth of grim serrations. But when it happened, the groundwave was subliminally faint before it reached the city.

I

SETH YANCEY listened restively, but his booted feet remained absolutely still on the gleaming parquet while Colonel Verstow, Colonel-General Malke's aide, performed introduction after introduction.

"Marshal Yancey, may I present Captain-General and Madame Carvel?" Verstow said in his punctilious voice.

Carvel was Malke's Ground Operations Officer. Yancey barely mumbled, "Madame . . . Carvel . . ." A quick nod for the man. A bow for the woman. Yancey knew his voice was dry and his bow

In science fiction at its most convincing a truly breathtaking quality of suspense can often be generated by psychological insight alone, for there is a high-voltage potential in basic human conflicts which simply must *be solved. When such conflicts blaze on the frontiers of tomorrow Algis Budrys becomes a superlative observer, marshalling all of his writing talents to bring us this inevitable first chapter in man's coming conquest of the stars. To the time-hallowed military pronouncement, "The Marines have landed," he has dared boldly to add: "A soldier's first task is to understand himself."*

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stiff. So much the better for his ramrod reputation.

He glanced over the ballroom, into a lake of boufant dresses studded with the hard rocks of black uniforms and silver piping. Down here, levels below the surface of the Moon, Artemida had found room for its luxuries.

"Marshal Yancey, Lieutenant-General Foth, Miss Belmagne."

Foth was the missiles section head.

Nod; bow. An extra look for Miss Belmagne, who had better prove to be essential personnel, and not just someone traveling under the vague designation of "general clerical staff." Foth was blanching a little as he caught one edge of the look. Belmagne seemed a bit startled by what the look seemed to convey. Yancey made a note to check the whole relationship through.

"Marshal Yancey, may I present Brigadier and Madame Kahane?"

"Madame . . . Kahane . . ." Kahane was Psychological. Madame was obviously the belle of the ball, or as much of a one as a Brigadier's wife could permit herself to be in this company. Yancey made his bow curt.

He wished Verstow would bring these etiquette formalities to a rapid close. Ladrie was supposed to be demonstrating the prototype armor tomorrow, and Yancey wanted to be supervising the preparations, instead of frittering away his time. But protocol demanded a reception for the Marshal, and so a reception for the Marshal there was, whether Yancey had better things to do or not. Four days, maximum, was all he dared allow himself off Earth, and here was one day gone and one night going.

He tightened his lips.

If *anything* went wrong, they could crucify the Interstellar Marine through him. And it wouldn't be any defense to point out that the other Services held receptions, too.

"To hell with the junior officers," he muttered to Verstow before the next couple stepped up. "Skip them. This could take all night."

Verstow smiled. "I assure you, Marshal, I had no other intention."

So that was it. He gave Verstow a hard look. Now they were reading him like a book, were they? "Smoke-and-Flame" Yancey, always in a rush, eh?

Well, good enough—as long as the reputation worked to his advantage in situations like this. But it might be therapeutic to give Verstow and some of these others a glimpse at a few back pages they hadn't counted on. Set them back on their heels a little.

Yancey had no illusions about his position. The day he stopped pressing them was the day they'd begin pressing back.

"Marshal Yancey, Brigadier and Madame Eberhardt."

The Public Relations Officer and

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his wife. Yancey made his best bow of the night. No harm in it—Madame Eberhardt was gray and consciously plain.

"Madame, may I congratulate you on your husband's accomplishments," he said. "Very nice spread in *Week,* Eberhardt. Keep it up."

"Thank you, Marshal."

"Not at all," Yancey told him. "The Service hoes a hard row, Earthside. Your work makes it a little bit easier. Now let's have some more like it."

"Yes, sir."

He watched Eberhardt move away with his wife. The other Services might make minor capital out of the I. M.'s giving its flacks brigade rank, but it was worth it. You got the best men that way. And there could be no blinking the fact that good men were urgently needed.

He noticed that there were no more waiting couples, and turned toward Verstow. "Is that the lot?" he growled.

"Yes, sir. As you know, Captain-General Hoff is supervising Brigadier Ladrie's work at the Experimental Station. He simply could not take the time to be here—with the entire Station working up for the demonstration."

"He's where he belongs," Yancey said curtly because of Verstow's smile. He looked at the aide for a moment. "I won't be needing you any more tonight. I'm sure one of Colonel-General Malke's other aides will be able to help me if something unexpected should come up." He waited for that to sink in. "I'd like to have you go up to the monitor board and observe the Station's transmissions for me. Let me know immediately if they seem to be having trouble setting up for the demonstration."

Verstow's eyes flickered. "Yes, sir," he said, in an even voice.

"That's all. Dismissed," Yancey said negligently, giving Verstow a cold smile.

No ballroom for you tonight, my lad, he thought icily. No fun. No frolic. And next time you start feeling superior to Seth Yancey because his parents were North Americans, you remember tonight and think it over. Next time you think I'm too G.I., and that keeping the I.M. up there with the rest of the bunch isn't a dead serious business—just you remember my face, Colonel. *Permanent* Colonel. That's important to you.

He walked across the ballroom floor with long strides, his crisp hair iron-gray and tight around the curve of his narrow skull, his whipcord body moving with military assurance in the dead-black uniform. His boots hit the floor with measured regularity, as if each step had been carefully timed.

II

YANCEY sat down gratefully when he reached Malke's table. They'd had their look at him. Now let them get their ball going, and

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the sooner it started gathering momentum, the better.

"Well, what do you think of my husband's officers?" Madame Malke asked unexpectedly.

Yancey grunted, his head snapping around toward her.

"That's hardly a politic question, Clara," Malke said in his habitually expressionless voice. He looked strangely like a leathery old turtle, his eyes sharp and alert in his boxy face.

Clara Malke was a handsome woman with a cryptic mouth and undistinguished brown hair which she brushed back without elaboration. Yancey had met her before the reception, and had taken note of her name and the preliminary impression of purposefulness she gave him. Then he had promptly forgotten her. Now she had forced herself on his attention again, and he felt a slight shock. He'd assumed he was finished with her—except for small talk—and he resented her upsetting his belief.

Every station had its officer's wife who pressed the privilege of her femininity. It was a common stereotype of military life. But he'd hardly expected to find it confronting him in the person of Malke's wife. Still, she was Malke's second spouse, and he'd noticed that most middle-aged men picked ultra-feminine women.

"I'm sure Marshal Yancey understands that I'm not trying to embarrass him, Karl," she said, turning briefly toward her husband and then back to Yancey. "Most of us have assumed, Marshal, that you're combining an unofficial tour of inspection with your main purpose of observing the demonstration tomorrow. After all, the next Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is normally expected to be able to utilize his time to the best possible advantage."

Yancey had to confess that the woman was dumbfounding. She delivered her sentences without any smile to make them the rather obvious flattery they sounded. And yet if it wasn't flattery, what precisely was it? Sarcasm? From Malke's wife? He hardly thought so.

Automatically, Yancey became aware that the orchestra had struck up, and that the junior officers were leading their partners out on the dance floor. But the main part of his attention was divided between Malke's wife and Malke, in a concentrated effort to find out what the game which was being played between them might be.

He got no satisfaction from Malke's face. Malke was an old soldier who held down the most important post in the Marine—outside of Yancey's. His seamed countenance had settled into a thin-lipped mask long ago. And Clara Malke's expression—polite, interested; even charming, perhaps, if you bother to catalogue such details—was no more revealing in a deeper sense.

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"That's hardly been decided yet, Madame Malke," he told her finally, convinced at least that Malke was no Verstow. His ambitions were not expressed in veiled snipings, and the same circumspection was to be expected of his wife. It was possible, however, that some perverse streak had boiled up in the woman tonight.

She might have been impelled to underscore some feeling that Yancey's superior in age and initial social position should also be his superior in fact. Or she might just generally have felt an impulse to dig her spurs into the upstart North American.

"Perhaps it hasn't been decided," she was saying now, "but it seems inevitable to all of us here. A career like yours—one of the Joint Chiefs at an astonishingly early age—and the progress of your advancement in the face of unusual obstacles—"

Yancey stiffened.

"—can only culminate in your achievement of the Chairmanship."

Yancey felt his jaw muscles knot, and fought down the tide of enraged blood that almost rushed into his face. He struggled to maintain a calm expression.

He felt something brush past his leg, and saw Clara Malke wince. Suddenly he was fighting instead to restrain a cold smile. Malke—old soldier Malke—had just savagely kicked his wife under the table.

He had to give her credit. Outside of that bare wince, her face remained determinedly impassive.

"As you no doubt know, Madame Malke," he said slowly, enjoying himself for the first time that evening, "there has never been a Chairman from the Interstellar Marine. We're too young a Service. A number of things must be obvious to a woman of your intelligence. It can be no new thought to you if I say that my appointment, if it comes—" *If I can push it through,* he thought, but kept the reservation mental "—or anyone else's appointment from our Service, would be a tremendous help in focusing public attention on the importance of the Nation's spatial arm.

"Whoever is chosen eventually makes very little difference to me. The important thing is that someday we'll have to fight in space. Who or what, no one knows. It's a very large universe. We have to have a Service equipped and manned to meet any threat or emergency. And until that day comes, each of us is fighting to maintain the Marine's prestige and reputation. Not one of us can afford a single mis-step. There are three other Services struggling for the appropriations we must have, and the men we need. Not *one* of us, Madame Malke—as I am *sure* your husband has told you—can afford to slip."

Madame Malke's expression was difficult to fathom. Yancey was positive he could see a glint of

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dry amusement at the corners of Malke's eyes.

Unusual obstacles, eh? Well, he hadn't gotten over them without learning a few conversational parlor-tricks, and he didn't envy the discussion Madame Malke would have with her husband later.

He heard the click of boot-heels coming toward their table, and turned abruptly away from Malke and his unaccountable wife.

It was Verstow. The aide was excited under his superficial calm, and probably touched with a certain amount of vengeful satisfaction at interrupting them. He reported directly to Yancey, and the sense of spitefulness was clearly there.

"Your pardon, Marshal. But there's been an explosion at the Experimental Station."

Yancey paled visibly. "Is it serious? Speak up, man!"

"Quite bad," Verstow said. "The station may have been completely destroyed."

Yancey sucked a savage breath in between his teeth. Malke pushed his chair back, but Yancey was on his feet ahead of him.

"How awful!" Madame Malke exclaimed.

III

YANCEY looked dispassionately at the pickup screens, his face cold. Beside him Malke was also standing quietly, letting Carvel do the actual directing.

"Nothing left there, Marshal," Carvel commented as the location cameras focused on the Experimental Station's site.

"Obviously," Yancey grunted. Slow lava was still oozing down the slopes of the hills that had previously ringed the project and the actual site was a glassy lake, congealing at the shores. "Do the Station's routine communications show what they might have been doing to set off something like that?" he demanded.

Grimly Carvel shook his head. "No, sir. There wasn't much traffic. Our log shows nothing but the usual Station-to-Base business."

"Well, how about a guess? Do you have any theories about what *might* have happened?"

Carvel looked uncertainly at Malke. Instantly Yancey turned his head, his eyes darkly mistrustful, almost accusing.

"Karl? What was up?"

Malke looked slowly at Carvel before he answered. "The explosion was nuclear."

"Most explosions are. What about this one?"

"Hoff was arranging a demonstration for you," Malke said, his face still expressionless, his gaze unwavering. "Carvel approved it—with my knowledge. Ladrie had completed the prototype suit. A volunteer was to wear it tomorrow on the proving ground. The plan was for him manually to set off a Type T bomb. There was no doubt he'd survive—possibly uninjured.

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I'm afraid something went wrong during the bomb's assembly."

Yancey took a deep breath. "I see." He shrugged. "Well, Hoff's gone."

Carvel sighed to himself, his face clearing.

"Carry on," Yancey told him shortly. He waited until the Ground Operations Officer had turned back to his screens and monitor technicians. Then he exchanged a look with Malke.

Malke twitched one shoulder, and Yancey nodded slowly.

With that settled, Malke turned to the business at hand. "Well," he asked, "what now?"

Yancey shook his head. "I don't know yet. I can imagine what the other Joint Chiefs will say when they hear about it." He felt his own discouragement in an acutely physical way, and the sensation made him harsh.

"Well, we've found out what can stop impregnable armor," he said. "A good, thick skull."

It was the wrong thing to say, of course. Hoff was a countryman of Malke's. But Yancey had to somehow break his tension loose. Even iron control had its snapping point.

He stood brooding at the screens, his eyes sunk deep under his sparse brows. The big lever the other Services had against him was that the Marine could not, at the present state of rocketry, deliver men in quantity to take and hold a planetary objective.

Transport vessels of any useful capacity would have to be impossibly fat targets and parachute drops were too chancy. Sky-borne troops were the best means available to the I.M. at the moment. But it was a tacit fact that the unpredictability of dropping men into planetary atmospheres, together with the bulky equipment they would need simply to survive, made the whole undertaking militarily ridiculous.

Ladrie's suit had been the answer, and Yancey had been playing it as his ace for the past two years. It was, briefly and specifically, complete personal armor. It was self-sustaining, mobile, and impregnable. Up to a point, the suit's alloy plating took the punishment. Past that point, there was Ladrie's development of the recoil field generators that powered spacecraft.

When the suit encountered an obstacle it could not fight, it rebounded. And should its detectors sense things it could not absorb, such as the sudden flare of a nuclear explosion, it enclosed itself in a spherical field which sent it flinging away like a rubber ball struck by a powerful jet of water. Impervious to heat, cold, vacuum, or radiation, equipped with propulsion units, and manufacturing its own air, food, and water, the suit would keep a man alive and well, and able to fight with its built-in weapons through Hell itself.

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Home, spacecraft, and general store—combined with an arsenal. That was Ladrie's description. Yancey shrugged virulently. Well, back to the drawing board, he thought. But where do we find another man like Ladrie? Where's my next chance?

He tightened his lips. Perhaps never again—certainly not for years now. They had him off-balance, with his best card gone. Now they'd press back, and he might well find himself on the defensive forever—or for as long as it took them to get him.

They'd find their openings quickly enough. There were some things you couldn't cover up. You could only show them a moving target, and when once you stopped moving— The receiving end. He was back on that. Everyone knew that North Americans were unreliable. Everyone knew they were the shakiest part of the New Democracy. North Americans were still being convicted of various degrees of treason every year or so . . .

No, sir! Not that again. He had to have an answer, quickly.

He stalked back and forth across the end of the monitor room, not caring for the moment whether anyone saw him in an agitated state or not. What do you give the public when it has been led to think of its Marine arm as impregnable?

He realized that he was wasting his energies to no purpose, trying to force himself to think coldly at a time when all detachment had left him. But the solution had to be found immediately. It had to be found before the Joint Chiefs held their inquiry, and the Council of State met to pass on the next appropriation, and the appointment of the next Chairman. If the President himself asked questions, as well he might, the answer had to be there—cold, sharp, concise and perfect. Not an excuse, and not a delay. An answer.

"Marshal Yancey, why haven't you delivered the impregnable suit?" *Not* "I'm sorry, gentlemen, we'll have to wait a few more years." It would have to be: "Because we have something better."

Always a moving target—never a sitting duck. Top them, top them every time, and leave them with their mouths hanging open. And meanwhile consolidate behind you. Build up the reputation they're all afraid of—bolster the image of a man who has never cracked. Make them uncertain about trying to oppose him. And fight, fight every minute of every bloody day—because no one ever stopped to count off even so much as ten seconds before the next winner's hand was raised.

"Marshal! Marshal; there's someone moving out there!"

Yancey leapt toward a screen, shoving a technician out of the way. "What coordinates?" he demanded. Carvel told him, and he

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set the screen with abrupt, experienced twists at the knobs.

He stared at the black Lunar night, blinked—and stared again. Scrambling up over jagged outcroppings, crashing down crater walls in eruptions of dust, and slogging constantly forward over the plain, was the impregnable suit. It was struggling back toward the distant city.

IV

YANCEY straightened up slowly, his face calm again. Then he barked at Carvel: "Why wasn't one of your men monitoring the suit's band?"

Carvel's mouth twitched nervously. "It's a special—an experimental wavelength used for no other purpose. No one expected it to be in use, Marshal."

Yancey stabbed the full force of his look into Carvel's eyes and held it there pitilessly. The officer blinked, but seemed unable to move. The disgrace he was sure he'd avoided was suddenly back to face him again, and this time there was no dead Captain-General Hoff to shoulder it for him.

"May I suggest, General Carvel," Malke said dryly from the corner where he stood with his hands clasped behind his back, "that if none of your technicians are monitoring that frequency you'd better take care of it right now."

"Of course, General." Carvel snapped out of his rigidity and began issuing an excited stream of orders to his technicians.

Malke watched him for an instant and then shrugged, looking directly at Yancey.

Yancey didn't even bother to acknowledge the gesture. That whole business was foregone from the first. What he wanted to know now was what the man in the armor had to say—whoever he was. Carvel was a dead issue. Yancey stood motionless, his weight balanced on his spread legs, waiting to hear the transmission details the man in the suit must be pouring out.

"—ase. Artemis Base. Come in, please. Over."

There it was. The words were strained. On the screen the armored man balanced himself atop a spire, his suit glinting faintly in the starlight.

"This is Artemis Base. Go ahead. Over."

"This is Major Pollack. Repeat. This is Major Pollack. I'm a little beaten up, but—all right. I'm on my way in. Have you located me?"

Yes, you ass, we've located you, Yancey thought with a sudden clean anger which convinced him he was back to normal—that everything was back to normal. Yes, we've located you, and I'm very glad you're in good health. But what about the armor, you—

He turned to glare irately at the pale and sweating Carvel. "Ask him about the armor," he directed. "First things first!" He strode over

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to Malke. "Who is that fool out there anyway?"

Malke's thin lips twisted in an ironic smile. "The original volunteer. Obviously not a happily constituted man."

So the suit had saved a nonentity. Not Ladrie or Hoff, but a Major Pollack.

"The armor's in good condition, but the servos and propulsion units aren't fueled," came Pollack's strained reply to Carvel's question. "I was in the suit when the T bomb exploded. I was making a final check on the field generators and detectors. I didn't even feel any blow, but the groundwave threw me. The recoil field definitely functions. But I'm moving around on my own mechanical power."

On the screen, the figure lost its purchase and fell. The armor rebounded from the plain below, and got to its feet again.

"Rough," Pollack gasped. "I'm padded in so I don't feel it, but my reflexes don't know it. He paused for a moment. "I've been walking for an hour."

That's too bad, Major, Yancey thought contemptuously. Didn't you expect to use your feet in the Marine?

He shook his head. What kind of a man did Pollack have the nerve to call himself?

"I must be at least ten hours away from Base," Pollack was saying. "Can you drop me some fuel?"

Yancey looked at Malke. "I suppose we have to, or the poor man will be too exhausted to be of any use to us by the time he arrives."

Malke raised one eyebrow. "I have a suggestion."

"Go ahead."

"Suppose we let him walk in. The demonstration of the suit's effectiveness comes a little sooner than planned, but perhaps there is a certain advantage in that, too. The loss of the Station is regrettable. But, after all, its work is obviously done."

Yancey thought it over.

Good idea. All right, that was taken care of. Now—*why* was it a good idea for Malke to bring up? Yancey's lips tightened.

Pollack. Pollack was a North American name.

Yancey kept his face firm and thoughtful, but his calves knotted, safely hidden in his knee-length boots. He hadn't forgotten that incredible dialogue at the ballroom table. Now for the first time it began to come into rational focus.

He looked up at Malke. There was no doubt in his mind that Malke was quite capable of cheerfully kicking his wife any number of times, so long as Yancey was capable of realizing it once.

Old soldier Malke. The man had it easier now but he'd had to learn every trick there was. To come this far—a man had to practice guile.

Clearly he had to look out for Malke, too. Something was in the wind.

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Correction. Until that moment there had been an urgent need to look out for Malke. But now the man had lowered his guard. He had not been able to resist what he thought was a safely obscure method of rubbing it into Yancey through his contempt of Pollack.

"What's the suit's moonweight?" Yancey asked.

Malke shook his head. "I have no idea."

"Carvel!" Yancey snapped.

"Yes, sir." Carvel was trying desperately to make Yancey forget his past sloppiness by remaining abnormally alert.

Yancey gave him a searching look.

"Precisely how much does that armor weigh?"

"The moonweight is somewhat over one hundred and ten pounds."

"Thank you," Yancey said. He turned to Malke with a troubled frown.

"I didn't dream it was that much," Malke said thoughtfully. "We had better furnish him with fuel. A messenger rocket should do. It's a good thing we realized it in time."

So the pattern was becoming clearer, was fairly leaping out at him. He might have known that even Malke's insults would be carefully tailored. Now it was up to Yancey to make the decision against fueling the servos which would let Pollack move his arms and legs without fighting the suit's weight, and the propulsion units which would let him fly.

What had irked Malke into being so bald about it?

The remark about Hoff, of course. He'd touched the man's pride of origin.

All right, Malke.

"Carvel," he said. "Tell Pollack he isn't getting any fuel. As of now, he's *performing a demonstration*. Let him walk in."

V

YANCEY strode down the corridor to his rooms, feeling the steady rage burning like fuel in his veins. His boot-heels echoed on the flooring, and his shadow preceded him like an angry ghost.

He walked alone. He knew that he did—had known it from so long ago that he could say "always." But there were some men you trusted more than others—either because you understood them and their motivations or because they were naturally not competitors.

He travels fastest who travels alone. All right, consider it proven afresh. Consider it underlined.

"Marshal Yancey."

"Madame Malke." He bowed, his face neutral. She'd turned out of a side corridor just as he'd felt his anger ebbing a little and he wondered how much of that was pure coincidence. "An unexpected pleasure," he said.

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She looked at him gravely. "It would be difficult to guess that," she told him without any tangible emphasis. Once again, he was at a loss to determine whether she was being flirtatious or sarcastic.

"I'm sorry, Madame," he said without much modifying his tone. "It's been a wearing night. Colonel-General Malke, I might add, is still in the Monitor room. And now, if you'll pardon my haste, I only have a few hours in which to sleep."

"What about the Experimental Station, Marshal? *Has* it been completely destroyed?"

With that, again, she dumbfounded him momentarily. The woman either had no manners and tact, or else she and Malke were working on a level he hadn't yet penetrated.

"I suggest, Madame, that your husband would be in a better position to give you that information," he said after a brief pause.

"I see." Still no overt expression—only a constant gravity which enabled her to accept and issue verbal statements like so many punched cards. "Thank you, Marshal. I hope the program hasn't been wrecked. It would be too bad if you had to go back and start all over again. And now I must apologize for keeping you. Good night, Marshal Yancey."

"Good night, Madame," he rejoined woodenly, after a short pause in which he had been unable to think of anything better to say. He bowed again, and walked rapidly away.

The woman's facial expressions and tones of voice seemed always at variance with the content of her words. There was no indication of any consistent meaning in what she said. In fact, she simply did not seem to care what she said. She shaded her speech with no overtones to give it significance. There was no way of telling what she was after . . .

He'd left orders to be awakened if Pollack seemed to be in difficulty. Otherwise, he'd planned to sleep for three hours, seeing no reasonable chance of gaining another respite during the next two or three days.

"Marshal Yancey," said a most unwelcome voice.

He cursed silently before he opened his eyes and rolled over toward the phone at his side. He knew he couldn't have been asleep for more than an hour. He touched the button. "Yes."

It was Carvel, looking even paler and more upset than usual. Yancey could see Malke standing almost out of focus behind him.

"Marshal, Pollack has left his line of march. He's going toward a fuel cache about twenty minutes away from his present position."

"I'll be right there," Yansey snapped. "Has he maintained communication with Base?"

"Yes, sir. But he's being evasive."

"I imagine he is," Yancey said

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cuttingly as he jammed his blouse into the tops of his trousers. "Has he disobeyed a direct order to return to his normal line of march?"

"He's pleading exhaustion, sir."

Yancey's lips set in a thin white scar across his jaw. "I'm on my way up," he rasped, switching the phone off. He could imagine what Malke would say about North Americans with a twist of his mouth and a lift of one eyebrow—accompanied, of course, by complete and tactful silence.

He flung his door open and marched rapidly up the hall to a lift, his eyes snapping. As he shot up to the Monitor room, he started cursing steadily and voicelessly. But because the lift was operated by an enlisted man he was careful to keep his face expressionless.

One more difficulty to clear up! Suddenly it seemed as if each difficulty he overcame only left room for another and more serious one to arise. Well, it had always been that way. He'd chopped them down as fast as they came up. But you'd expect a little let-up now and then.

He ought to know better. There was never any stopping for breath. And especially not now—with his campaign for the Marine's full recognition finally coming to a head. Critical times bred crises by contagion.

He strode out of the lift into the Monitor room, taking in at one swift glance Carvel's white face and Malke's impassive stance. He looked at the screens.

"How far away from that fuel is he?" he demanded.

"About ten minutes now, Marshal," Carvel said in an anxious voice. "It's one of our unmanned emergency caches—for the vehicles."

"But the suit can use it, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

Yancey turned and walked over to Malke.

"It is too bad you lost out on your sleep, Seth," Malke said.

Yancey grunted. "What's been happening?"

"He began complaining again almost immediately." Not a muscle twitched in Malke's face. "Carvel kept reminding him at intervals that he was under orders. But such reminders did not seem to have any effect on him at all—except possibly an adverse one. Fifteen minutes ago, after a particularly bad fall, he stated that he had remembered the location of a nearby fuel cache, and requested permission to draw fuel from it. I denied permission, but he changed his line of march notwithstanding." Malke shrugged. "I ordered Carvel to wake you."

Yancey returned his attention to the screens. The bulky, squat shape was lurching unsteadily toward a beacon mast plainly visible about a quarter of a mile away. It moved slowly, dragging its feet, and then kicking them out for drunken distances before recovering.

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"Major Pollack," Carvel was saying into a microphone, "you are under orders to complete a demonstration test of the suit under manual operating conditions. Abandon your present route and continue progressing toward Base."

There was the sound of labored breathing over the speakers, and then Pollack's slurred voice came through.

"General, the armor *cannot* be operated manually. It's a physical impossibility, even in this gravity. I'm fighting a total mass of almost seven hundred pounds." Pollack stopped to drag a noisy breath into his lungs. "I've done my best, General, but I can't go on. It's physically impossible."

"Nonsense, Major," Carvel answered. "The joints are almost frictionless. You are not being asked to move anything like the suit's total mass in any one motion. I have to remind you again that you are under direct orders from Marshal Yancey."

Pollack sighed. "I can't help that, General. If the Marshal wants successful demonstrations, he'd better rescind the orders on this one."

"Major Pollack, unless you—"

"Carvel!" Yancey jumped for the microphone controls and snapped them to *Standby*. "Are you going to engage in discussions and threats with a subordinate officer?" he demanded, feeling the enraged throb in his temples.

Carvel stared at him hopelessly, the microphone held limply in one hand.

"Good God," Yancey said in baffled contempt. But the same reason that had made him cut Carvel off now kept him from going on. He swept his eyes down the row of technicians, all of whom were keeping their attention rigidly fixed on their work.

Carvel must be in a bad way—in a really bad way, to be floundering like this.

And Yancey had almost made the same mistake—had almost discussed an order to a subordinate. Except for Carvel's complete funk, he had almost created an opportunity for a quarrel in the presence of ordinary personnel.

Yancey took a deep breath. "Now, General," he said in a calm voice, "suppose we try another tack."

Carvel simply stood where he was. His eyes were wide open, and he was apparently unable to keep them from Yancey's face. But they were lifeless and past despair.

"Carry on," Yancey said without a trace of anger. "Don't bother talking to him at all—unless he changes his mind or something else unforeseen happens. Let him keep going."

It was hardly the type of order Carvel expected. His obvious surprise triggered off one last attempt to compensate for his mistakes.

"Sir?"

"Yes, Carvel?"

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"May I suggest destroying the fuel cache before he reaches it? It's not a cache of any particular importance to us."

Yancey shook his head. How many nuclear explosions did he want Yancey to explain?

"That won't be necessary, General. Thank you for the suggestion, however."

He walked back and stood beside Malke.

"My apologies, Seth," Malke said softly. "Do you want him relieved immediately?"

Yancey shook his head slightly. "No. I'd like to, but not in the middle of an operation—unless he grows completely ineffectual. There will be no living it down if we did that."

Malke nodded. "I'll keep a close eye on him." The thin lips pursed. "He was a good enough officer. But now he has gone to pieces. You've noticed how many do, as the result of one mistake at the wrong time?"

"Pressure of guilt," Yancey grunted sourly. "Snowball reaction. They try to pull out of the first mistake, and they try too hard. That makes another mistake, and then a third. A downhill run."

"Perhaps. I agree with your analysis of the reaction. But the cause may not be guilt. It might be simple fear."

Yancey shrugged, looking carefully at Malke's profile as the old officer kept his eyes on the screens. Malke might be feeling a kind of professional sentimentalism for Carvel's predicament, but it was quite as likely that he might be developing some new subtlety. The practiced, leathery face couldn't be read for the answer.

Yancey wished, in a sudden weary flash, that discipline could be perfect. He wished that men were consistent in their trustworthiness or constant lack of it, and that he didn't have to fight through each day with the knowledge that he'd have to fight again tomorrow.

In short, he thought dryly, I want the millennium to come now, as a special favor to me. He wondered whether he might not be feeling the first chill touch of age.

"He's reached the fuel," Malke said.

Yancey looked up. On the screens, Pollack had opened the door of the metal bubble where the blocks of fuel were stored. He ignored the radioactivity warning flasher, and moved inside.

Yancey looked at the screen, his eyes brooding.

Here was a suicide-prone man, who'd driven himself to insubordination. A North American, too, but that was for later consideration. What mattered now was that another crisis had come up at the worst possible time. Chance had piled one tragic occurrence on top of another, until it looked as though there would have to be a miracle to pull Yancey out unscathed.

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Almost savagely, he wondered where his bad luck came from . . .

VI

POLLACK walked easily out of the fuel cache, closed the door carefully behind him, and stopped. His voice was over-formal.

"This is Major Phillip Pollack, Interstellar Marine Officer's Identity Card Number Ten thousand fifty-eight dash nine eight three. I wish to report the abstraction from Fuel Cache Number Six, Artemida Base Sector, of one block of Type four nuclear fuel, by myself, for the purpose of emergency fueling. I am wearing an experimental armor suit, no Quartermaster Corps Issue Number, and the above fuel has been utilized in the said mechanism."

He paused and took a deep breath. "General Carvel, I am now proceeding toward Artemida Base, and estimate my arrival time as approximately five minutes from now. I will enter through the main military gate. Over."

"Simple acknowledgment, Carvel," Yancey barked.

"Yes, sir." Carvel depressed the 'send' switch. "Your transmission received and acknowledged. Over."

Malke looked at Yancey, the comment on Pollack's transmission obvious in his expression.

Yancey looked impassively at the screens. Inside his suit, Pollack must have touched his field controls at the same instant, because the suit now left the ground, hovered for a moment, and began to accelerate.

Pollack was being legalistic, obviously anticipating the possibility of court martial, frightened, and trying to cover himself in all possible directions.

Yancey cared very little for any of that. What counted was that the armor was being delivered.

He turned to Malke. "Well, let's go down and welcome him home," he said. His boots echoed on the floor as regularly and as forcefully as they ever had. He led the way into the lift, with Malke and Carvel following him.

Cover the explosion at the Station. Deliver the armor. There'd be time for some Base technicians to go over it and make drawings of the circuits and parts. Ladrie wouldn't be missed, and everything would work out more or less along the original projected lines.

Fine. Now, how do we cover? Well, there's Hoff. That's automatic. Struck down by his own negligence. And Carvel.

Yancey nodded to himself. That would keep the other Chiefs handcuffed. They couldn't raise a stink if the Marine cleaned house before they even knew there was anything wrong. And they couldn't get around that suit. C.O.D., one impregnable armor, one Interstellar Marine with a real all-around punch, one Chairmanship for Seth Yancey.

What was it Clara Malke had

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said? Something about advancement over unusual obstacles at a remarkably early age.

Up and down. Touch and go, all his life. But there it was at last—because he'd learned how to operate better than the rest of them.

C.O.D., one North American who's better than you are.

What made Clara Malke tick?

He led the way out of the lift, striding down the corridor toward the main airlock.

Now, what could Verstow want? He watched narrowly as the aide came hurrying up the corridor toward them. He stopped and waited impatiently for the man to reach them.

"Well?" he snapped.

"Your pardon, sir. This just came in to the communications center, encoded and addressed to you. We ran it through the decoder as soon as we could. It's marked for immediate delivery."

Yancey took the envelope out of Verstow's hands and ripped through the decoder's seals.

It was from both the President and the other Joint Chiefs, and read:

"NAVAL OBSERVATORY REPORTS NUCLEAR BLAST AT LUNAR COORDINATES EXPERIMENTAL STATION. FORWARD SOONEST PRACTICAL EXPLANATION CIRCUMSTANCES. SUPPLY ESTIMATE OF DAMAGE, REPORT RESULT TO ARMOR PROGRAM. EXPLAIN YOUR FAILURE TO FORWARD IMMEDIATE REPORT OF EXPLOSION."

Yancey carefully folded the paper and put it in his pocket. He held his face immobile.

The Navy. The busy, busy Navy. All right, they'd get a report—wrapped up, with all the loose ends taken care off, just as he'd been planning a minute ago. He would not be able to spring it on them cold now. But maybe this was better. They'd be expecting a stall from him. They'd figure they had him in a corner at last. And he'd fling the suit in their faces, together with Hoff and Carvel, and they'd be in the corner instead.

And Seth Yancey's reputation for not being a man to fool with would go up another notch.

He smiled deliberately, moving the corners of his mouth just enough for the expression to be seen, but not so much that the carefully watching men could know he meant them to see it.

He turned to Malke. "Before I forget—we'll want an inquiry board hearing set up early tomorrow. I want to get this whole business cleared up fast."

Malke nodded, not looking toward Carvel, and Yancey knew Malke had been expecting just such a request.

Verstow caught the exchange, as Yancey had thought he would, and Yancey smiled again—this time within himself. From Verstow's point of view, it was bound to look

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like something he and Malke had previously touched on. Or at least enough like it to keep Verstow from becoming sure it was a response to whatever had been in the message.

And that would leave Verstow confused. Only Carvel might have a clearcut idea that Earth was pressing him. But what Carvel knew or didn't know no longer mattered. Looking at Carvel's damp hands plucking nervously at his uniform, it was obvious that Carvel himself realized that.

Yancey resumed his stride down the corridor to the airlock chamber, and the others kept in pace behind him.

Hit and run. Be a moving target, and lay smokescreens on the tighter turns. It was rough. It was nerve-wracking. But he was better at it than they were.

He strode up to the squad of men detailed to handle the airlock's operation and dismissed them.

"Sir, there's a man coming in," the officer in charge reported.

"I know that, Captain," Yancey snapped.

"Yes, sir."

Yancey watched the officer lead his men out of the chamber. Then he checked the airlock observation screens. Pollack was just coming up to the outside door. Yancey touched the cycling controls, and Pollack stepped into the lock. Behind the squat helmet's faceplate, he saw the officer's forehead beaded with sweat, and his mouth twitching in an uncertain pout.

Then the cycle completed itself, and Pollack stepped into the chamber, the metal feet of the suit dragging uncertainly over the chamber floor. The armor dripped with decontaminant, and Pollack's ashen face was wet with more perspiration than the suit's absorbers could handle.

For a moment, Yancey did nothing but look at the man's weak face, with its frightened eyes and unsure mouth. Then he said: "Well, Major, we're all glad to see you made it."

Pollack's voice came huskily through the diaphragm in the helmet. He'd hardly been expecting to meet Yancey face to face, without even a last-minute opportunity to steel himself.

"Yes—uh—yes, sir," he stammered. The suit's arms moved irresolutely. The irrational conviction that nothing very serious would happen to him had obviously left Pollack as soon as he entered the Base.

Yancey waited for him to stew a bit more.

Pollack's tongue wet his lips. "Sir—I'm willing to face charges."

Yancey still didn't say anything. The suit made Pollack much taller than an ordinary man, and Yancey looked up into his face, despising him for being a North American.

"Any charges, sir? I was tired and upset—but that's no excuse."

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"That's very good of you," Yancey said dryly. "There won't be very many counts against you. Aren't you pleased?"

The rage beat heavily at his control. Malke and Verstow were standing right there, and so was Carvel, all three of them watching a North American who could by no stretch of the imagination be called a man.

"Sir—"

"Yes, Pollack," Yancey said wearily.

"I'm all confused," the man said, his face working. "I want to do what's right. I came back here," he offered. His face blanched suddenly. He must have turned the absorbers up too far, fumbling nervously with the controls, which were probably standard space-suit equipment operated by fingertip touches inside his gauntlets. He corrected the over-compensation with a convulsive movement of one hand.

"Yes, you did that much," Yancey rasped sarcastically. Here I am, Daddy, he thought in fury. I played hookey from school, but I didn't run away from home. See —I'm not *all* bad.

"Sir," Pollack said with obvious effort, "I don't know what to do." His voice edged up to the breaking point, and then his nerve went over the psychological crest, the words coming out in an almost plaintive rush.

"Sir, I'm afraid to come out of the suit!"

VII

"WELL?" Yancey demanded.

Kahane, the officer in charge of Indoctrination and Psychological Welfare, rubbed a hand through his hair. He slapped the back of his other hand down on the file folder on his desk.

"That's our dossier on him. Maladjusted, introverted, held in contempt by his subordinates. Detached from duty as Canteen Supervisor, and ticketed for shipment back to the pool on Earth. Passed over for promotion twice. Original promotions on the basis of high theoretical aptitude, unfortunately never particularly well tested in actual practice until we got him. Confused and unstable in the face of reality. Unable to cope with normal social routine."

North American, Yancey lashed out in his mind. He thought of the satisfaction Kahane must be getting out of this, and his calf muscles trembled with strain.

"What else?" he demanded.

"When asked to volunteer for an unspecified hazardous duty, he inquired whether the hazard was likely to be fatal. When informed that there was an outside chance, he volunteered on impulse. As you've said, he's inclined toward the suicidal. At the moment, physical means having failed, he's trying psychological self-destruction. He knows he's physically safe in the suit. But he's succeeded in placing himself in a position where

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the longer he stays in it, the worse it will be for him when he finally takes it off. At least, that's my evaluation. There's another I like a little less, but it may very well turn out to be the right one."

Kahane rubbed his scalp again. "It's not as neat an explanation. But if you consider that he's a trouble-prone to begin with, as a good many of these extreme cases are, then he would have fouled himself up, one way or the other, on any other duty. This duty simply happened to involve an impregnable suit, equipped to feed and care for him. Suddenly, he's out of trouble. He's back with Mother. He's upset by all the trouble he's causing other people, because he's sensitive that way. But he, personally, is safe. In that case, he may never come out."

Yancey stared across the office at the metal wall. He discarded most of what Kahane had told him. He had yet to meet one of the perfect case histories into which each of these men converted his patients in discussing them for the edification of laymen. But the final verdict agreed with his own evaluation. Pollack would not come out of the suit. Certainly not in time.

"Where is he now, by the way?" Kahane asked.

"In a detention room."

"With that suit on?" Kahane's eyebrows rose.

"He was willing to go. He even suggested it. He's perfectly willing to go through the forms of arrest."

"Suppose he changes his mind?"

"Then he'll batter his way out. Out through the side of the dome, if necessary. Or he can use his weapons, and burn his way out."

But that was one eventuality Yancey had dismissed. The enormity of the crime he'd be committing would stop Pollack before he even began. The man was congenitally spineless.

"Do you want me to go down there and see what I can do?"

"No. Absolutely not. I'll handle this."

One wrong move, and the suit might be gone for good.

Pollack had to come out of that suit. Tomorrow or the day after, at the very latest. The report to the Joint Chiefs was going to show that Yancey got the North American out, and no one else. It had to be that way, or they had him.

"All right, Kahane. Thank you. Go back to bed." He stalked out of the office, looking at his watch. It was six o'clock. He had three hours before he presided at the inquiry, and in those three hours he had to have an answer to show Earth.

He had to have more than that. He had to make positive moves to counter whatever Malke's wife and Malke himself were up to. He had to stiffen the Base personnel from the series of shocks they'd received. He had to stamp out all the little fires, before they destroyed his ability to meet the main problem.

He'd gotten past the situation

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at the airlock by the skin of his teeth, by clamping down hard on his feelings until Pollack could be isolated. Several times he'd almost exploded past his barriers of reason and ordered Pollack out of the suit. But he'd had Carvel's mistakes for a fresh example. Pollack was past the point of obeying orders. Pollack had almost reached the point of no return at all.

Just as I am, Yancey thought. *Just as I am.* One slip now, and I'm through. The realization hit home like an icy blow. He was fighting for his life. His thoughts became a self-dialogue, categorical and imperative, and relentless in its logic.

I've got to have something to stop the Chiefs and the President cold. I don't have to have the suit tomorrow, but I've got to have at least SOMETHING *to keep them down there and me up here. If they recall me now, that's it. Period. Seth Yancey's out the window.*

Three hours. All right, Yancey, let's get the lead out. Let's show 'em one more time.

If I could figure out what Clara Malke's up to— To Hell with Clara Malke! We can always shunt her off into some harmless spot without bothering to analyze her. Conspirators can conspire all they want to, in a vacuum. Cut off her influence, and she's nothing. Axiomatic. Some people you chop down, and some you push out of the way.

He paced the corridors restlessly, but keeping his step even and his face calm. No one who saw him could possibly guess there was anything wrong.

VIII

"CAPTAIN-GENERAL Carvel will testify," Yancey said in an expressionless voice, watching the man get up shakily and walk forward to stand in front of the desk.

It was a closed inquiry, as it had to be. Aside from the necessary three observers—Verstow, Foth, and Eberhardt—there were only Malke and Carvel in the small room with him. The sealed recorder hummed on the desk beside him.

"We are here to determine the degree of Base personnel negligence involved, General," Yancey reminded Carvel. "There is no accused party as such. Your statement should be made with an eye to furnishing as much information as possible, in order that it may be determined on whom—if on anyone—the responsibility is to be fixed. Go ahead, please. State the circumstances under which a T bomb was placed at the disposal of the Experimental Station."

Carvel ran his hand over his mouth. "Upon completion of the suit design program," he began nervously, "Captain-General Hoff forwarded a request for a T bomb to me. His stated intention was to use it in testing the suit."

"You have file copies of his request?"

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"I do, sir. A copy has been made available to this inquiry."

"Very well. Please give the name and rank of every person whose authorization was required before a T bomb could be placed at Captain-General Hoff's disposal."

"Colonel-General Malke and myself, sir."

"Thank you. Now, General—will you please briefly state the present condition of the Experimental Station?"

"It is completely destroyed, sir. Obliterated." Carvel plucked at the seam-piping of his dress uniform. "It's a very great tragedy, sir."

"Were there any survivors among the Station personnel?"

"No, sir."

"Except for Major Pollack, who was fortunately in the suit at the time of the explosion. Is that right?"

"Yes, sir, that is correct. I'd forgotten Major Pollack—he's not one of the regular Station Personnel."

"Thank you," Yancey said dryly. "Captain-General Hoff was on the Station at the time of the explosion?"

"Yes, sir."

"And there were no communications from the Station in any way referring to an assembly, modification, or any other work then in progress on the bomb?"

"No, sir, there were not."

"Therefore, it must be your conclusion that no investigation could possibly determine exactly what happened, Major Pollack having furnished this inquiry with a sworn statement of his own lack of information?"

"Yes, sir."

"But, since Captain-General Hoff was in command of the station, and therefore was in a position of responsibility for any work being done there, you must assume that the explosion was the result of some unfortunately indeterminate negligence on his part."

"Yes, sir." For the first time, Yancey saw a flicker of hope cross Carvel's face.

"You agree, then, with established military doctrine on this point?"

"Of course, sir. I have never once questioned it."

"And on all other points as well, we may presume, eh? Good. Now—Captain-General Carvel. You stated earlier that you and Colonel-General Malke both authorized the T bomb's allocation to the Experimental Station. Your authorization was signed as Ground Operations Officer at Artemida Base, I assume?"

"Yes, sir." Carvel's eyes flickered uneasily.

"Technically, T bomb storage and supply is under your jurisdiction, as head of a semi-autonomous unit within the administrative structure of Artemida Base. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

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"Very well. But Colonel-General Malke is your superior officer as head of that administrative structure. Am I correct? Would you go so far as to refuse an authorization already bearing his signature?"

Verstow sucked in his breath loudly enough for the sound to dominate the room.

Carvel saw his opening. "No, sir, I most certainly would not," he said, in a voice that was almost a sigh of relief.

"It follows then," Yancey said, his voice hardening into finality, "that, under the same military doctrine which fixed negligence on Captain-General Hoff as commanding officer at the Station, the primary responsibility rests with Colonel-General Malke for authorizing issuance of the T bomb to a negligent officer.

"This inquiry is thereby led to a conclusion of gross negligence on the part of Colonel-General Malke, resulting in the complete destruction of the Experimental Station. That includes, of course, the destruction of all its research facilities and personnel, and the further loss of all available complete data on the armor program, and the near loss of the only complete prototype suit. You may sit down, Captain-General Carvel, and thank you."

Carvel stepped back, smiling nervously, not quite able to believe it.

Yancey looked steadily at Malke. The impassive face was not cracking. Neither face was. The two tight-lipped men faced each other across the room.

"This inquiry is led to the previously stated verdict," Yancey said evenly. "Captain-General Hoff is hereby ordered posthumously stripped of his rank and decorations, and reduced to the grade of Junior Lieutenant, his name to be entered on the revised Interstellar Marine records as such.

"Colonel-General Malke is hereby ordered to the mandatory penalty of death by firing squad, the sentence to be carried out immediately upon recess of this inquiry. Captain-General Carvel is hereby ordered reduced to the rank of Brigadier, with prejudice. This inquiry is now closed."

Yancey stood up.

And that clears up a lot, he thought. That takes care of today's report, and yesterday's mess you got me into about Pollack, and anything else you and that wife of yours might have been cooking up for my benefit.

Malke, my fine old soldier, you forgot. You forgot Seth Yancey never forgets, and you forgot he's one North American, Pollack or no Pollack, who's a faster man than any of you.

He watched the military police guard escort Malke out of the hearing room.

So now let's see you operate without him beside you, Madame Malke.

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IX

HE HAD TO get Pollack out of the suit. Technicians could sit and look at it all day. But they had to get it open—had to pull the generators out of their recesses, disarticulate the joints, and diagram the circuits—before he had all of his problem solved.

Not: "Here's a man in an impregnable suit. He's close to insanity, and I can't get him out." It had to be: "Here's a sample suit. This is the way it works. Put that in your gullets and digest it."

He strode away from the hearing room, his mind working at a cold, peak level of efficiency.

He'd stamped out the little fires. During the night, he'd gotten that answer. It gave the Chiefs and the President more than they expected. It cut off what had looked like a bad combine. It set the Base personnel back on their heels. Now they knew there wasn't anyone he couldn't handle. Counter-shock. They'd straighten out now, before they even realized how bent they had become.

And Carvel was probably grateful, too.

"Is the hearing over, Marshal?" a woman's voice asked.

He swung about, instantly cautious and on his guard.

It was Madame Malke. He looked down at her coldly.

"Yes, it is," he said slowly. There was no one else in the corridor. Malke, Carvel and the three observers had all left by the same door—but to different destinations.

"Will it be good enough for the time being?" she asked.

Yancey felt the rage boil up in him again. She was ineffectual now, but there was still no getting past the familiar barrier. There was still nothing in her expression or tone of voice to give him a single clue as to what she really wanted to know. And meanwhile she went right on saying incredible things, asking tactless questions — as though she had absolutely no idea of what they meant.

"I fail to grasp your meaning," he answered stiffly.

A slight smile flickered over her face, and vanished. It might have meant anything. "I'm assuming you held the hearing so that you could give Earth some concrete answer."

He stared at her dispassionately. "The purpose of a military inquiry, Madame, is the most rapid possible correction of a flaw in the proper course of military affairs."

"Marshal, you're the most punctilious man I've ever met. My husband told me you were going to sentence Carvel today. And I can easily guess why. I'd like to know if that step proved to be enough, in the present situation." And *still* nothing showed on her face. She simply looked at him gravely, possibly awaiting an answer.

No conception of the complete crassness of what she was saying.

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No grasp of politeness. Nothing but that complete vacuum in which he had to grope for a meaning that constantly eluded him.

What was she after? What did she *want?* Did she talk just to hear herself talk?

Frustrated rage beat at his mind.

"No, Madame. Since you ask, you are quite right. General Carvel was not the only person found negligent."

She nodded gravely. "I see. Then I *was* right. You found it necessary to give them my husband, too."

"Colonel-General Malke was found guilty by due process of military law," Yancey said. "I regret being the messenger of this news."

He waited for her to crack, seeing her unreadable face through a faint mist of red rage. His voice was now harsh, loud, and almost out of control.

She shook her head. "Regrets are quite unnecessary, Marshal. I expected it."

Her face showed not the slightest trace of surprise or grief—or anything else. What in God's name went on in her mind?

Yancey's rage had drained out of him, washed out by a tidal wave of complete wonder.

He could not—he literally could not—communicate with this woman. She was living in some world of her own in which emotions had no place, and apparently nothing had any personal meaning. He could not accept that anyone could maintain any pretense of calm as perfectly as she did. Nothing touched her. Nothing *could* touch her.

And yet he had to be mistaken. She would need to have some reason for saying the things she habitually did. Somewhere behind it all there had to be a systematic plan.

But there was no getting it out of her. She was almost frighteningly unapproachable. And with sudden incongruity, he knew what might get Pollack out of the suit. His mind cleared, and he looked at her.

Try it, he told himself. If Kahane's anywhere near right, there just might be something in it.

He looked at her, standing impassively in front of him, and knew that if there was anyone on the Base who might help—she was the one.

"Madame Malke."

"Yes, Marshal?"

"Your position in this entire affair has become very precarious. It's possible a civil court might press the matter farther. Do you agree with me?"

She nodded. "It's quite possible. There's the question of whether my husband was willfully negligent, and if so, for what motives. You're right. I might very well find myself on trial." The thought left her no more perturbed than she had been.

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"I believe that, with your help, I can get Pollack out of the suit," Yancey said. "Naturally that would tend to mitigate any suspicions which might arise."

She nodded. "What do you have in mind?"

"Pollack is a psychopath. He is afraid to come out of the suit because he knows if he does he'll have to stand court martial for insubordination. But his basic drive—the real reason for his clinging to the suit's protection—is that he feels safe nowhere else. But given someone to defend him and protect him, someone who is at the same time—"

He found himself at a loss for the proper words in which to put it. Madame Malke supplied them.

"He's a misfit—an immature, withdrawn individual. And his hopes of ever being on any kind of a friendly basis with a woman qualified to be a general's wife are nil. So I am to be mother, sister, and protector to him—at least long enough for him to abandon the suit."

"Precisely, Madame," Yancey agreed. "If we attack him through his neurosis, we might succeed."

"I assume I'll be free to combine that task with a few discreet references to my being able to soften the court martial down to a mere formality?"

"You may tell him anything you wish. But the main appeal—if anything will work—will be your manner and general attitude of sympathy toward him, not so much what you say."

She nodded. "I imagine we'd better start as soon as possible."

"The sooner the better." He stared at her levelly. "I'd like to suggest," he said, "that a different hair style might be in order."

"Whatever you like, Marshal. I'll be ready in half an hour."

"Thank you."

"Thanks are not required, Marshal. It seems to be a mutually beneficial arrangement. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll get started."

"Of course." He bowed and strode off in the opposite direction from the one she took. His paces were long, hard, and vicious.

Well, we just might have it, he thought. We just might. And then we can sit back and watch the other Chiefs try to swallow what they bit off.

We can still think on our feet, by God! We can still get up off the floor.

But we still don't know what makes Clara Malke tick.

X

YANCEY switched to another screen and got a better view of Pollack. He was still sitting with his metal helmet in his hands, talking in a mumbled monotone. Clara Malke was sitting directly across from him in the detention room, quietly listening.

She'd been in there three hours

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now. Yancey knew that a complete cure might reasonably be expected to take days. But he didn't have days. He had eighteen hours, at the outside.

He cut in on the microphone nearest Pollack, feeling the tension in his muscles.

He'd sent the first report down an hour ago. Even so, he had been forced to stretch it longer than caution dictated. It was sooner than they'd be expecting, but he could have sent it earlier. What delayed him had been the illogical hope that Pollack would crack almost immediately. Finally he'd gone ahead with the transmission.

His mouth hooked upward at one corner as he recalled the wording.

"The Experimental Base explosion and attendant circumstances were nothing that couldn't be handled from here. Inquiry this morning cleared up the situation completely. Am returning to Earth tomorrow with complete specifications and prototype armor which has undergone complete tests."

It was the last sentence that could crucify him if he didn't deliver. But he'd had to put it in. Top them every time. Once less than every time wasn't enough.

On the screen, Pollack raised his helmeted head. Yancey could make out the officer's agonized expression clearly.

"I don't know, Madame Malke. I just *don't know*. I've got myself into another mess, and this one's so big it's defeated me. I'm supposed to be an officer and a man. But that doesn't make any sense to me any more. How are you *supposed* to feel? I didn't change any when I graduated from the college. I'm still a separate human being. I *know* I'm not like other people, and I can't change myself. I've tried, God knows."

More of the same weak-kneed drivel he'd been hearing all along. Yancey grimaced, watching Pollack drag himself through the muck.

"Most people aren't like other people," Clara Malke said in reply, her voice strangely calm. She was sitting under a light which threw auburn glints into her hair —glints which Yancey didn't doubt Pollack found attractive. "All of us have to decide, at some time or the other, what we're going to do with ourselves."

Yancey'd expected something different from her—a warmer technique. But apparently she wasn't much of an actress. She was talking to Pollack in much the same way that she usually talked. But she at least had his attention, and apparently his confidence. Maybe she had thought of that—had realized that the officer would be quicker to accept someone who, in her own way, was as un-normal as he was in his.

"I know, Madame Malke," Pollack went on. It was grotesque to watch the massive armor gesturing with frustration and inarticulateness. "But you don't live by

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just *knowing*. It's more than that. You've got to feel it—you've got to have it down in your bones. If you've got that, then you can be different and still feel as though you're part of it all. But I don't *understand* most people. I do things and say things I think are sensible, and nobody understands me. I watch them, and they do things *I* can't understand.

"I'm—I'm out of place. Madame Malke, you're the first *honest* person I've met in my life. You're the first person that's ever understood me. You understand about my not wanting to come out of this suit."

That had been an interesting little set-piece, Yancey thought, smiling coldly. He'd gone down to the detention room with Clara Malke, not even bothering to explain her presence, knowing it wouldn't be necessary. He'd begun angrily pointing out that Pollack couldn't stay in the suit indefinitely—that as soon as the converters developed any trouble he'd starve or poison himself.

He'd paced up and down, raging with frustration, until Clara Malke interrupted him fiercely: "Oh, leave him alone! Can't you see he just wants time to think?"

Exit Marshal Yancey, discomfited, leaving Clara Malke behind.

And now Pollack was pouring out his heart to her. Simplicity itself.

But would it get him out of the suit?

It had to. It was as stark as that. There was no other choice.

Nine hours. And still the only result was reel after reel of recorded mouth-noises. Progress there was. But whether enough of it had been made, Yancey couldn't tell. He sat tensely behind his desk, watching, and waiting.

Clara Malke was sitting in the chair again. She'd come out of the detention room twice, ignoring the technicians waiting to get at the suit. Each time she'd left, Pollack had become almost dangerously restless.

Pollack apparently still had not questioned the sincerity of her interest in him—her complete willingness to devote nine hours to his company. Or perhaps he was just numbly grateful for someone who spoke an approximation of his own language, and was afraid to investigate.

"Madame Malke, I'm in too deep! I don't dare take the chance. I know Marshal Yancey wants this suit very badly. But I become alarmed when you say that he'd be willing to go easy if I gave it up. I don't trust him. You can't trust any of these people!"

That, too, was down on the tape. Yancey'd marked the spot.

"Phillip, that's not important. If you can't feel that you want to give up the suit, *don't*. The choice is yours."

The armored figure gestured. "It keeps getting worse," Pollack sighed. "It gets worse with every

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minute. I can't even leave here and go anywhere. They'd just follow me, and if I ever took the suit off, even for a single minute, they'd be waiting. I'm in a cage."

It sounded promising. But there was no telling.

Theoretically, a North American was just as good a citizen of the New Democracy as anyone else. If he met the physical and mental requirements, he couldn't be denied the right to go to the war college, after the usual investigation.

But they ought to know better, Yancey thought with a bitter twist of his mouth. How many of these do they get for one of me? Bewildered weaklings, all of them or most of them—completely unable to get along in the real world.

At the twelve hour mark, Pollack broke. He had been weeping intermittently for the previous two hours. The combination of physical exhaustion and emotional storm must have destroyed his last resistance.

"Madame Malke, I don't know. You're the only friend I've got, or even if you're not that, you're the only person I want for a friend. I can talk to you. I—" He stopped, and Yancey saw his eyes grow wide behind the faceplate. "I'm going to do it. Right now, before I stop myself again."

He jumped to his feet, and the helmet began to unseal, tipping slowly back. As soon as he had any appreciable aperture at all, Yancey fired the automatic guns that exploded instant anesthetic capsules into Pollack's face. The suit tipped and fell with a crash. The technicians jumped into the room.

Clara Malke sighed.

XI

YANCEY looked across the shuttle's lounge at Clara Malke, and he still didn't know any more about her than he had from the first. She was sitting quietly, occasionally looking at him, sometimes saying a word or two, but refusing any real communication.

The woman infuriated him. He'd had to take her into the shuttle with him, because she was included in his report. He couldn't hope to cover up the Pollack episode, not with Artemida buzzing about it. But he could successfully juggle the sequence of times a little, and have everything come out in accordance with his first report.

And yet—he couldn't seem to draw any satisfaction from his victory. Everything *wasn't* coming out right, for some reason. He couldn't get her to understand what a triumph this was, for one thing. For another she'd been so completely wooden when he thanked her for helping him with Pollack. She seemed to feel no pride or relief—or anything else he could classify as an emotion.

Now they were only minutes from Earth, and he felt, somehow, that if he didn't break her down

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by the time they landed he'd spend the rest of his life tormenting himself over the problem.

He tried again.

"Madame Malke."

"Yes, Marshal?"

"Tell me. At the reception, you came quite close to referring to my origin." He set his teeth and went on. "Do you feel North Americans to be an inherently weak class?"

He'd said it on impulse, borrowing her tactics. Now he sat in cold amazement, wondering whether he was even more obsessed with breaking through this wall of non-communication than he'd suspected.

"No more so than other human beings. We're all one kind, Marshal. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know," he murmured to himself. In a louder voice, he said: "Because obviously some people don't agree with you. And on very strong grounds, too. Take Pollack as a typical example."

She looked at him in astonishment. "Marshal—Pollack isn't a North American. He's from South Africa. I'm amazed. But then, I forget that you were only at Artemida for a few days. Pollack managed to make himself and his autobiography fairly notorious. I don't think there was anyone who hadn't heard the story of his life at second hand. He'd told it to someone or other in a mistaken moment. A number of people found it hilariously amusing."

Yancey took a deep breath. "Are you sure?"

"Of course. Marshal, you seem to feel that North America is a place to be ashamed of. I can understand the prejudice in other people. It is a fact that North Americans have a difficult time in acclimating themselves to the atmosphere in other parts of the New Democracy. But so do a number of other people. A rather significant number, I might add." She stopped for a moment, and Yancey saw her looking completely dumbfounded for the first time since he'd known her.

"Marshal, is *that* why you've built that crust of defensive reactions around you?"

He got up and looked fixedly out through a port, watching the Earth coming up to embrace them, so she couldn't see his face.

"Defensive reactions?" he asked in a numb voice. "I don't understand you."

She got up and stood next to him. "And I didn't completely understand you, either, it seems. But it's very hard to talk and listen to someone who doesn't use the same language."

He looked at her, and still couldn't read her face. He had no way of knowing whether she was lying or not. She might even be deliberately grinding his face in the dirt. She might very well have guessed just what he'd done to her husband, and be gloating in her own unguessable way.

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He took a deep breath. That no longer mattered. There was something else boiling up in him. It had been there, growing and gnawing at him all along. He did not fully grasp what it was but he could not ignore it.

He opened his mouth and let the words come out by themselves.

"Madame Colonel - General Malke," he said, his pulse driving through his body and throbbing at his temples, "I would like, I wish —I'm unmarried . . ."

He stopped, horrified at what he'd been incubating in his brain.

She shook her head. "I'm sorry, Marshal. And I feel sorry for you." And he had no way of telling whether she meant it. She spoke with complete candor in her voice, and her expression could not tell him what she hoped to gain by lying to him.

"But I dislike you." She went back and sat down. "I'm afraid all profound neurotics fail to understand other people, just as Pollack did. That wouldn't have made any difference yesterday. Today it does, because when you present your report to the President, I'll be going with you and you'll have to introduce me. Or, now that you know why you've been manufacturing excuses to bring me with you, perhaps you won't. It doesn't matter. I'm mentioned in the report. I'll get someone else to do it. You see, I'm not nearly as strange and enigmatic a person as I seem to you. You wear distorted lenses—"

Yancey shook his head, trying to clear it. "I can't understand what's happening. Very little of what you're saying is at all compatible with a rational attitude." He straightened his shoulders and clamped his jaws.

"Please sit down, Marshal. I like you least when you're drawing up your shell. As for the other thing, it was you who implied that I was the sort of woman who'd appeal to an immature neurotic. Doesn't that pretty well apply to you. You seek—a mother substitute."

Yancey sat down, shaken by his own idiocy of a few moments ago and completely unable to fathom Madame Malke's meaning. He had hardly thought her the kind to resort to childish insults.

He kept his face turned away from her, looking down at the growing square of the field, where he could get out and get back to work, without having to deal with people who made no sense. Soon he'd be out of this whole crazy mess, and running on all twelve again.

He watched with anticipation as the ship settled down to the ground, already impatient to hurry up and unload his suit of armor.

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reaching for the stars

by . . . Sidney J. Bounds

When nature bestows a too shining gift loneliness is the smallest penalty a man may have to pay.

THE TELESTAT reproduced a strictly formal message:

"The captain presents his compliments and requests the pleasure of Mr. Winter's company at his table. Permission to view the star-screen is granted if required."

Even as Robert Winter read the words, the implications behind them registered in his brain: *The captain regrets like hell that he cannot think up an excuse to avoid granting common privileges to a freak like Winter, who is a Very Important Person and must be treated as such.*

Nevertheless, Robert Winter smiled and was happy to receive the invitation. He left his cabin and walked briskly toward the forward control room along the main corridor of the interstellar ship. It had been a long trip and there was the desire in him, strong and insistent, to hear again the sound of men's voices, even though their speech might be guarded.

Probably Captain Ffoulkes was hoping that he would decline the invitation. But why should he? He had stayed in his cabin throughout the trip, in deference to the

A science fantasy short-story may cross the Atlantic to arrive at our desk bright with glints of North Star mysteriousness. Or it may simply float in through our office window from the purlieus of Park Avenue! In either case, our spirits soar. Sidney Bounds is a gifted English writer—a newcomer to our pages. Dramatic indeed is his skilled approach to the telepathic mutant theme.

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unspoken wishes of everyone aboard *Stella III*. Surely he was now entitled to some small measure of human company—or did they think he knew nothing of loneliness, he who was shunned by all levels of society?

Robert Winter strode the length of the ship, a tall and handsome man with soft gray eyes and blond hair. However tragic his destiny, there was nothing about his physical appearance to set him apart from other men. The corridor was metal-paneled, with concealed strip lighting, and the air was chemical-pure. The bulkheads throbbed slightly to the pulse of mighty engines.

Half-way to the control room he passed one of the stewards. The man did not speak, but moved on with tightly compressed lips and lowered eyes. Even his silence meant something to Winter.

I'm not opening my mouth. You can read a man's soul in the words he uses.

Winter reached the door of the control room, and knocked once. There was an instant of silence before Ffoulkes answered: "Come in."

I can't very well tell you to go to the devil. But that's how I feel.

Robert Winter, mutant extraordinary, opened the door and went in.

The control room was spacious and simply decorated in pastel colors. Beneath the star-screen the pilot's console loomed in the shadows like some grotesque mechanical nightmare—all dials and levers and pushbuttons. The First Officer sat in the pilot's chair and Captain Ffoulkes stood behind the chart case with his feet apart and his hands firmly interlocked behind his back.

Only the two, top-ranking officers in that large room. He realized at once that the other officers had hastily found duties elsewhere when the captain had issued his invitation.

Winter walked forward and held out his hand. "Nice of you to remember me, Captain," he said warmly.

Captain Ffoulkes took his hand and frowned. Then clearing his throat, he affirmed: "We're below light-speed now. We'll be landing in a matter of hours."

And I'll be glad to see the last of you! Damned glad!

He waved a hand towards the pilot. "You know Mr. Brand?"

"Yes," Winter said, looking directly at the First Officer.

Brand nodded faintly in answer to the introduction. He did not speak and appeared intent on his controls. Ffoulkes, a broad-shouldered, red-faced man, avoided Winter's eyes. He swung about and pointed significantly at the star-screen.

"That's the Andromeda nebula," he said. "Omega is the bright star in the foreground."

Must be careful not to talk too

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much. Stick to the facts. Give nothing away.

Winter looked at the black screen which filled nine-tenths of the wall opposite him. He saw a motionless spiral grouping of lights—mere scattered pin-points distorted by a three-quarter viewpoint. Omega was an incandescent disc near the base of the screen.

"The rim of the Galaxy," he said, musing. "The furthermost star from the center of our own island universe. Beyond that—nothing. Nothing for two hundred thousand parsecs. Even *Stella Third* is incapable of spanning so great a gulf in a man's lifetime."

"Omega is far enough from Earth for me," Ffoulkes grunted. "I'll be glad to turn around and go back."

Glad to get away from him. But of course I can't tell him that.

"Will you take a glass of wine before we go into dinner, Mr. Winter?" Ffoulkes asked.

Winter nodded. "Yes, I believe I will. Thank you."

Ffoulkes made an elaborate ceremony of opening the sherry bottle and pouring the wine into two beautifully engraved glasses. He took his time because the task spared him the necessity of speaking.

"A toast," said Robert Winter, raising his glass. "To a safe landing." He had been tempted to say: *To a better understanding,* but he changed his mind at the last moment.

"To a safe landing," echoed Captain Ffoulkes, "and a speedy return."

Away from you . . .

"Shall we go into dinner, Mr. Winter?"

The captain's table was set apart from the others in the ship's dining room. Conversation dropped to a whisper as Winter walked in and seated himself directly under the mural depicting the first successful flight to Mars.

Ffoulkes signaled to the steward, and his gesture implied: *Get this over with as quickly as you can. I have to sit here but I'm not enjoying it.*

The meal began in a strained silence. At other tables, the officers had been indulging in lively reminiscences and trivial but revealing gossip of home and the wives they had left behind. But at sight of him that conversational interchange quickly subsided and the sound of heavy breathing and a clatter of cutlery replaced it.

Winter thought: *I'm losing the habit of easy conversation. Ffoulkes is married. I could easily ask about his wife, but if I did he'd misunderstand. He'd think I was prying.*

He finished his soup and the steward removed the empty plate. Across the table, Captain Ffoulkes forced a smile. "Embarrassing for both of us," he muttered.

Winter said: "You'd be well advised to relax, Captain. I thought I had made it clear when I first boarded your ship that I am in-

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capable of reading thoughts. My special ability resides in the fact that I can read, instantly, the *literal* meaning behind words. The endowment is no more than that."

Ffoulkes grunted noncommittally.

What's the difference, you damned freak?

"In language, pictures, and symbols," said Robert Winter, choosing his words with care, "and in virtually every mode of communication between men there is always some loss of meaning, some confusion involved. But not for me. I comprehend instantly the thought behind the words. The true meaning comes through to me without distortion."

"I suppose it's a useful gift to have," Ffoulkes replied, staring down at his plate.

Useful—and dangerous.

"Useful—and disturbing," Winter said, deliberately, correcting the captain's unspoken reservation. "Because of it I am avoided, Captain. I am a tragically lonely man."

The plates were cleared and dessert brought. Ffoulkes completed his meal in silence, pushed back his chair and stood up.

"I hope you'll excuse me, Mr. Winter. I have some work to do."

I've done my duty. He has no right to expect more of me.

"Of course," Winter said. "I've enjoyed your company—thank you."

Robert Winter walked back to his cabin and lay down on his bunk. Shunned by his fellows because he was different; feared by them because he saw into the secret places of their hearts—could a man be more alone with his solitude?

He picked up a book and started to read. As he turned the pages the printed words became thoughts and he slipped into the mind of a poet long dead. He understood completely what the poet had tried to say with totally inadequate images—the whole, rich fabric of imagination took on more glowing colors and came vividly to life in his mind.

Books were his only friends—words on a printed page, music from a tape recorder, pictures on canvas. Through them he conversed with other men. In his actual presence the writer or artist would have become instantly inarticulate, afraid of revealing himself. Alone among men Winter could not be taken in by words designed to hide some base motive. Through words alone he could penetrate to the hidden meaning, and understand the inner torment and hypocrisy, or the inner nobility of even a writer of genius.

Winter was now thirty-five, but he had been born with his special ability. Ever since he could remember it had been a tormenting embarrassment to him. At school he had been hated and despised by other children and, growing through adolescence, avoided by every girl whose company he had

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sought. He had early discovered how tragic loneliness could be.

He had obtained a job with the government, and the authorities had been quick to find uses for his extraordinary mutant talent—both as a human lie-detector in dealing with criminals, and in breaking the diplomatic corps ciphers of some potential enemy country. He was also invaluable in promoting understanding between allies and in searching out the abstruse meaning behind the pronouncements of mathematicians and phsyicists. In these and similar roles he had no equal.

The realization slowly grew in him that he was a man apart—the first, perhaps, of a new species. His original talent isolated him from the main stream of humanity, and for years he had sought another of his kind. But he had found no human of comparable talents on Earth.

Through casual conversation he discovered to his horror how base were the motives which often drive men forward in the name of progress. The petty desires, the inherent viciousness, the self-seeking of men in high places—all this was bared to him in words which seemed designed to deceive.

Sickened by his discoveries, he shut himself away from the world. But not for long. The desire for human companionship quickly forced him back to the society of men. They despised him because he was different. But he could not despise them, for he understood only too well that understanding implied the acceptance of viewpoints that differed radically from his own.

Whether a man struggled to convey a powerfully experienced emotion or used language to conceal it, he understood. Instinctively he grasped the significance of the symbols used—without effort as his birthright. Yet the reverse condition did not apply. He could no more communicate the exact state of his own mind than could a man less gifted to anyone but himself.

At first he had struggled to create symbols of his own which would resolve the confusion caused by imperfect language, but he soon realized that the human race was not yet ready for full understanding.

He had left Earth for Venus, hoping to find tolerance and acceptance among the young pioneers of that newer and more virile society. But his fame had grown with the years and already he was marked out as a man from whom no secret could be kept. He had found himself as lonely on Venus as he had been on Earth.

He traveled to the colony of a distant star-system, but again he encountered neither companionship, nor acceptance.

It was there that he met Natalie and suffered the ultimate torment and defeat. She was young in years but ripe in experience—an

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extraordinarily beautiful woman who fired his desire. He fell in love, and she wanted him—but only for what she could gain through him.

She spoke of love—but her words lied. She was cold and hard and scheming. She was a woman who appraised the risks and made her bid, on a coldly calculating basis. And she saw in Robert Winter potentialities which would lead directly to great power.

Her plan was simple. By his talent he would learn the dark and often criminal secrets of men in positions of high authority, and use that knowledge ruthlessly to extort money. It would have been blackmail, vicious and unadorned.

He was appalled, and she could not understand why. The liaison did not last long. Winter's love could not survive the shock of knowing how base she could be. He left her and moved on to other colonies on other star-systems. He traveled through the Galaxy, alone and haunted by a love that could not be . . .

"PREPARE FOR landing," ordered a mechanical voice over the cabin speaker. "Contact will be established in thirty minutes.

Winter relaxed on the pressure couch and wondered how great would be his success or failure on this, his first visit to the planet of Omega, the Galaxy's outermost star.

Quite recently archaeologists had discovered relics of an ancient civilization on that distant world, just as, all through the Galaxy, men had found traces of an alien culture which exceeded in antiquity the dim beginnings of human life on Earth. But on Omega's solitary satellite, was more than the usual meaningless artifacts. Here a written legend inscribed on endurable metal plates had been found.

No one, so far, had been able to decipher the written language of Omega's vanished civilization. Scientists throughout the Galaxy could only speculate in great excitement about the discoveries which might be revealed when the plates at last yielded up their secrets. And Winter had been assigned the task of enabling those conjectures to soar.

Stella III landed. Winter walked down the ramp with his shoulders held straight, his lips set in tight lines. Behind him someone had begun to sing. It reminded him that he had heard no singing on the trip to Omega.

The light had a strong orange tint, and the air was warm and pleasantly scented. The landscape reminded him of Earth, and yet he was continually surprised by the unexpected shapes of plants or rock formations. The sun appeared larger than Sol, and he found its first magnitude brilliance somehow disquieting.

A stranger waited beside an atom-powered runabout—a tall,

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gangling man wearing shorts and an open-necked shirt.

"Mr. Winter?" he asked formally. "I'm Johnson."

I'm not opening my mouth any more often than I have to. You're here to read the alien legend, not what goes on in my head.

So it was beginning all over again—even on an unexplored world at the rim of the Galaxy. More than ever Robert Winter despaired of ever finding one of his own kind, or a society that would gratefully accept him.

"It was nice of you to meet me, Mr. Johnson," he said.

The runabout carried them swiftly towards the colony—a scattering of several hundred prefabricated huts surrounding a tunnel that penetrated deeply into the rust-red, boulder-strewn soil.

"Everyone here takes the plates pretty seriously," Johnson said. "We've been looking forward to your arrival."

And when you've translated them you can't get out of here fast enough to please us.

"There can be no doubt that we are concerned here with a race that became extinct long before Man developed on Earth," Johnson went on. "Our research places the time of this culture so far back in prehistory that any date we might assign to it would be meaningless."

"What kind of symbols are used?" Winter asked.

"A picture language," Johnson informed him. "But the pictures do not tell a story in the normally accepted sense. We suspect that each picture represents a symbol in the alien language. The closest analogy I can think of are the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt—though there's no real similarity."

The runabout stopped.

"We've a house ready for you," Johnson said. "I suppose you'd like to eat and rest a bit before starting work?"

A house well away from the colony. We don't want you prying into our domestic affairs.

"No," said Robert Winter. "I'll take a look at the legend first."

"Right!"

Good. The sooner this is over, the quicker we'll get rid of you.

No one else came near them as Johnson led Winter into a building near the end of the tunnel. No one wanted to meet the loneliest man in the Galaxy. A large room contained six trestle-tables and on each table lay a sheet of engraved metal.

"We took these six sheets out of the ground and cleaned them with acid," Johnson explained. "There doesn't seem to be any more. Let's hope they tell the whole story."

Winter walked forward to study the first legend. In complete dedication to his task, he told himself, he could forget himself, his despair, his isolation, and his strange talent. A long-forgotten race had something to tell him—and the secret would be his alone, to share

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or not to share as he might decide.

The plates were covered with deeply engraved lines representing figures which were not even remotely human. As his gaze traveled from one symbol to the next his excitement grew. Each symbol was more than a letter, a phrase even. Each portrayed a complete step in the history of the race.

Johnson asked eagerly: "Can you read it?"

Winter nodded but did not look up. Each picture embraced a time interval of thousands of years and there were . . . how many? Enough to cover six sheets, surely.

The aliens had not originated on Omega's planet. From the center of the Galaxy, their empire had spread ever outwards from star to star and planet to planet—much as Earth's dominion was expanding now so many aeons later. They had reached this last planet at the edge of the Galaxy, and gone on. Their science had made possible the enormous leap from one island universe to the next. They had gone to Andromeda.

And the last leap had occurred so long ago that it was more than probable that they had traveled on to still another Galaxy, even remoter than the great Nebula.

Robert Winter experienced a profound happiness, for here at last he found the understanding which he himself possessed. The alien race had acquired the same instinctive grasp of the meaning behind symbols. Not one lone member of the race, but the race as a whole. Their ability to communicate was so highly evolved that Man's fumbling speech seemed inconceivably primitive by comparison.

He learnt also that they had not always possessed this strange talent, but that it had grown in scope and potency as the race matured. The development had taken centuries, and at first only one mutant had known the misery of loneliness, of being a creature apart.

Winter studied the history of that lonely one, finding in it his own torment clearly mirrored. Other mutants had sprung up with later generations, increasing in numbers until the entire race accepted the new understanding as no longer peculiar. It was then that the race as a whole experienced a spiritual renaissance, for with the new understanding old conflicts died.

With the new understanding, an indomitable racial purpose had been born. The aliens had reached for the stars—and now they were gone.

The parallel was plain. Man was evolving even as this ancient nonhuman race—and he was the first link in a chain which would someday encircle the universe. Robert Winter was a prototype for the New Man.

It would not happen in his lifetime. Generations would be necessary for the change to take hold.

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But it would occur. Long after he was dead men with his shining talent would reach for the stars. He thought: *next stop, Andromeda.*

"What does it say?" Johnson asked impatiently. "Can you write down a translation?"

Write it down and then get out of here, you freak.

Robert Winter smiled. "Yes," he said. "I will write it all down for you."

It was night on the lone planet of Omega and Andromeda was a far-off glimmer of star-dust in the heavens. Winter walked by himself, his head thrown back and his gaze on that distant spiral of light. He looked into the future and saw his own kind speeding away from the Galaxy, outwards and ever outwards to the rim of the universe itself.

There was a song in his heart, for he had discovered purpose in his suffering. He was no longer alone. There had been others like him before, and there would be others again.

He ceased to dwell on the past. He was a freak, isolated and despised. He would walk alone all of his days and know no companionship. It was a burden he must learn to live with, but it would be easier to bear now, for despair had been replaced by pride and self-knowledge. His understanding at last touched himself and he was at peace with the universe.

Among the Contributors to Next Month's Wonder Issue will be

RAYMOND F. JONES, *with* "The Thinking Machine"
ROBERT BLOCH, *with* "The Founding Fathers"
WARD MOORE, *with* "The Rewrite Man"
ROBERT F. YOUNG, *with* "Requiem in Granite"
IB MELCHIOR, *with* "The Winner and New . . ."
MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY, *with* "Peace in the Wilderness"

and many others

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blind lightning

by . . . Harlan Ellison

The creature was repulsively alien—a monster. But it could still lift up its voice and cry: "Strange One, show me a star!"

WHEN KETTRIDGE bent over to pick up the scurrying red lizard the thing that had been waiting in shadows struck.

The thing rose nine feet on its powerfully-muscled legs. It had an iridescent, glistening fur and it resembled a gorilla and a brahma bull and a kodiak bear and a number of other Terran animals. But it was none of these creatures.

The comparison was as inaccurate and as brief as Kettridge's last moment of horrified awareness. He saw one of the thing's huge paws crashing down toward him. Then the brief moment ended and Kettridge lay unconscious.

Thought: *this is the prelude to the Time of Fast. In bulk this strangely-formed one will equal many cat-litters. It is warm and does not lose the Essence. When the Essence-Stealer screams from the heavens, the strangely-formed one will be many feastings for me. Safety and assured Essence are mine. O boon at last granted! To the Lord of the Heaven I turn all thought! Lad-nar's Essence is yours at Ending!*

The huge creature bent sharply from the waist and scooped up the

The will to believe in something—if only in a rock or a tree inhabited by a spirit of the air—is far older than homo sapiens. The will to believe in Man himself is not old, however. And when that will is transferred to an alien entity on a planet of light and fire—wonder takes on a new dimension.

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man in the form-fitting metallic suit. It brushed in annoyance at the belt of tools around the human's waist and looked over one massive shoulder at the sky.

Even as Lad-nar watched the roiling dark clouds split and a forked brilliance stabbed down at the jungle. Lad-nar squinted his eyes, unconsciously lowering the thin secondary lids, and filtering out the worst of the light.

He shivered as the roar screamed across the sky.

Off to his left another blast of lightning slanted down, striking a towering blue plant with a shower of sparks and a dazzling flash. A peal of thunder followed it. The jungle smoked.

Thought: *many risings and settings of the Great Warmer it has taken this Time of Fast to build. Now it will last for many more. The Great Warmer will be hidden and the cold will settle across the land. Lad-nar must find his way to the Place of Fasting. This strangely-formed one will be many feastings.*

He shoved the man under one furry arm, clasping his unconscious burden tightly. Lad-nar's eyes were frightened. He knew the time of Death and Forbidden Walking was at hand.

He loped off toward the mountains.

The first thing Kettridge saw when he awoke was the head of the creature. It was hanging terrifyingly suspended in the light from the storm. The roar of the rain pelting down in driving sheets, and the brilliant white of the lightning, heightened the dreadfulness of the huge creature's head. The wide, blunt nose had three flaring nostrils. The massive double-lidded eyes seemed to be lighted from within by fires which blazed up in them like flickering twin comets. It had a high, hairy brow, and there were black half-moons under its cheekbones.

It seemed to be snarling. Certainly its pointed teeth could not have been bared more maliciously.

Kettridge was a man past the high tide of youth. He was not a strong man. At the beast's snort, he lost consciousness for the second time.

There followed a short stretch of half-slumber, confused, tormenting. Finally Kettridge blinked several times and raised himself on his elbows.

Lad-nar was still sitting with his powerfully-muscled legs crossed—sitting just inside the mouth of the small cave regarding Kettridge steadily.

"What—what *are* you?" Kettridge groaned. "We weren't expecting anything so large. The survey said—" Kettridge's voice quavered into silence.

Thought: *what is this? The strangely-formed one speaks in my head! He is not one with the cat-litters. They cannot speak! Is he a symbol, an omen—from the Lord of the Heaven?*

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What is it you ask, strangely-formed one?

Kettridge felt the surge of thoughts in his mind. He felt it smash against one nerve after another, sliding down in his head as the questions reverberated like an echo from far away.

"My God, the thing is *telepathic!* . . ." "You're telepathic!" he murmured, hardly daring to believe it could be true.

Thought: *what does he mean? What do you bring to me, strangely-formed one? What is it that you say to me and that I hear as a Reading Of The Essence? How do you speak? Are you from the Lord of the Heaven?*

Lad-nar's thick, leathery lips had not moved. The fanged mouth had not even twisted in speech. But to Kettridge it seemed that there must be a third being in the cave. A speaker who roared in his mind, in a voice sharp and alert.

Thought: *there is no one else here. This is the Place of Fasting. Lad-nar has cleansed it of all previous Fasting Ones. You do not answer. There is fear blended into your Essence, as it has always been with the cat-litters. Yet you are not one with them. Speak! Are you an omen?*

Kettridge's lips began to tremble. He stared up in awe at the startlingly bright, double-lidded eyes, suddenly realizing that the creature was more than telepathic. It was two-way receptive. It could not only direct thoughts into Kettridge's mind. It could just as easily pluck the ideas from his reeling brain.

"I—I am from Earth," whispered Kettridge, sliding up against the warm stone wall of the cave.

Thought: *The Heaven Home! I might have known. The Lord of the Heaven has sent you to me as many feastings.*

In the space of a few short seconds, as Lad-nar spoke deep in his mind, Kettridge received a complete mental picture of the being's incredible life. He had known there were living creatures on Blestone —many animal oddities in a barbaric hiding state. But the preliminary survey had not prepared him for any life of so complex a nature. Obviously Lad-nar's race was dying off.

Kettridge tried to blank out his thoughts but was terrifyingly unsuccessful.

Thought: *you cannot hide the speaking in my head.*

Kettridge became frantic. He knew exactly what the thing planned to do. He had received a cold mental image of the creature crouched mercilessly above him, ripping his right arm loose from its socket with a cruel purposefulness. The picture was hideously clear.

Thought: *you have seen the feasting. Yet you are not like the cat-litters that squeal in fear every moment that I feast on them. If you are not to eat, an omen from the Heaven Lord—what are you?*

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Kettridge felt his throat muscles tighten. His hands inside the heat-resistant gloves clenched. He felt his age settle around him like a heavy mantle.

"I'm an alien ecologist," he said, knowing he would not be understood.

Thought: *that has no meaning for me.*

"I'm from Earth. I'm from one of the other—" He stopped, drawing in his breath quickly, and pulling the resilient hood of the suit against his mouth with an effort. The being could not possibly know about the other planets. It could not see a single one of the stars. Only occasionally could it see the sun. The dense cloud blanket of Blestone hid space forever from its gaze.

Thought: *Urth! The Heaven Home! I knew! I knew!*

There was a jubilation, a soaring happiness in the thought—an emotion at once incongruous and terrifying. But blending with it was a humanness—a strange warmth.

Thought: *now I will sleep. Later I will feast.*

With the single-minded simplicity of the aborigine the creature put from its mind this revelation of its religion, and obeyed the commands of its body. Tired from hunting, Lad-nar began to sleep.

The thoughts dimmed and faded out of Kettridge's mind like dwindling smoke wraiths as the huge creature slipped over onto its side, and sprawled out in the gloom, completely blocking the open mouth of the cave.

Kettridge's hand closed over the service revolver at his belt. It was reassuring to realize that the charges in the weapon were powerful enough to stop a good-sized animal.

Grimly he looked at the nine feet of corded muscle and thick hide that lay directly in his path. Then his gaze swept the narrow confines of the cave. It was just possible that he could kill before it could rip him to shreds. But did he really *want* to kill Lad-nar?

The thought bothered him. He knew he had to kill—or be killed himself. And yet...

Outside the lightning flamed and crashed all around the cave. The long storm had begun.

Through the thin slit between the rocks and the creature Kettridge could see the sky darkening as the storm grew. Every moment there was a new cataclysm as streamers of fire flung themselves through the air.

Blestone's atmosphere was an uncomfortable-to-humans one hundred and fifty degrees Fahrenheit, and the creature's body heat almost certainly as high. The very nearness of the creature would have effectively ruined the aging career of Benjamin Kettridge had not the Earthman's insulated suit protected him.

He hunched up small against the

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wall, uncomfortably aware of the rough stone through the suit.

He knew that the beam from the *Jeremy Bentham* was tuned to a suit-sensitive level, but he knew also that they wouldn't come to pick him up until his search time expired. He wasn't the only ecologist from the study-ship on Blestone. But they were a low-pay outfit and secured the most for their money by leaving the searchers in solitude for the full time.

The full time had another six hours to run.

In six hours Lad-nar would almost certainly get hungry.

Kettridge ran the whole thing through his mind, sifting the facts, gauging the information, calculating the outcome. It didn't look good. Not good at all.

He knew more about Lad-nar than the creature could have told him, though, and that at least was a factor in his favor. He knew about its religion, its taboos, its—and here he felt his throat go dry again—eating habits, its level of intelligence and culture. The being had kept nothing back, and Kettridge had some astonishingly accurate data to draw upon.

Not quite what you signed up for, is it, Ben? Startled by his own mental speech, he answered himself wearily, *No, not at all.*

Kettridge wondered what Lad-nar would think were he to tell the Blestonian he wasn't a blue plate special, but a washed-out, run-down representative of a civilization that didn't give one hoot in Hell about Lad-nar or his religion.

He'd probably chew me up and swallow me, thought Kettridge. A more bitterly ironic thought followed—*which is exactly what he'll do anyhow. It would take a powerful weapon to stop him.*

It seemed so strange. Two days before he had been aboard the study-ship *Jeremy Bentham,* one year out of Capitol City, and now he was the main course at a Blestonian aborigine's feast.

The laughter wouldn't come.

It wouldn't come because Kettridge was old, and tired, and knew how right it was that he should die here, with all hope cut off. Lad-nar was simply following his natural instincts. He was protecting himself. He was surviving.

Which is more than you've been doing for the last ten years, Ben, he told himself.

Benjamin Kettridge had long since stopped surviving. He knew it as clearly as he knew he would die here on this hot and steaming world far from the sight of men.

Think about it, Ben. Think it over. Now that it's all finished and you tumble out of things at sixty-six years of age. Think about the waste, and the crying, and the bit of conviction that could have saved you. Think about it all.

Then the story unfurled on a fleeting banner. It rolled out for Ben Kettridge there in a twilight universe. In the course of a few minutes he had found life in that

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shadowy mind-world preferable to his entire previous existence.

He saw himself again as a prominent scientist, engaged with others of his kind on a project of great consequence to mankind. He recalled his own secret misgivings as he had boldly embarked on the experiment.

He heard again the sonorous overtones and the pith and substance of his talk with Fenimore. He heard it more clearly than the blast and rush of the thunder outside . . .

"CHARLES, I *don't think* we should do it this way. If something were t happen—"

"Ben, nothing whatever can possibly happen—unless we become careless. The Compound is safe and you know it. First we demonstrate its applicability. Then we let the dunderheads scream about it. After they know its worth, they'll be the first to acclaim us."

"But you don't seem to understand, Fenimore? There are too many random factors in the formulae. There's a fundamental flaw in them. If I could only put my finger on it—"

"Get this, Ben. I don't like to pull seniority on you, but I have no choice. I'm not a harsh man, but this is a dream I've had for twenty years, and no unjustified temerity on your part is going to put it off. We test the Compound Thursday!"

And Fenimore's dream had overnight turned into a nightmare of twenty-five thousand dead, and hospitals filled to overflowing with screaming patients.

The nightmare had reached out thready tentacles and dragged in Kettridge, too. In a matter of days a reputation built on years of privation had been reduced to rubble. But he had not escaped the inquests. What little reputation he had left had saved him—and a few others—from the gas chamber. But life was at an end for him.

Ten years of struggling for *mere survival—no one would hire* him even for the most menial of jobs—had sunk Kettridge lower and lower. There was still a common decency about him that prevented utter disintegration, just as there was an inner desire to continue living.

Kettridge never became—as did some of the others who escaped—a flop-house derelict or a suicide. He just became—anonymous.

His fortunes ebbed until there was nothing left except slashed wrists or the bottle.

Kettridge had been too old, by then, for either. And always there had been the knowledge that he could have stopped the project had he voiced his doubts instead of brooding in silence.

Finally the study-ship post had saved him. Ben Kettridge, using another name had signed on for three years. He had actually welcomed the cramp and the

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squalor of shipboard. Studying and cataloging, under the stars, had enabled him to regain his self-respect and to keep a firm grip on his sanity.

Ben Kettridge had become an alien ecologist. And now, one year out from Capitol City, his sanity was threatened again.

He wanted to scream desperately. His throat muscles drew up and tightened, and his mouth, inside the flexible hood, opened until the corners stretched in pain.

The pictures had stopped. He had withdrawn in terror from the shadowed mind-world, and was back in a stone prison with a hungry aborigine for keeper.

Lad-nar stirred.

The huge furred body twisted, sighed softly, and sank back into sleep again. Kettridge wondered momentarily if the strength of his thoughts had disturbed the beast.

What a fantastic creature, thought Kettridge. *He lives on a world where the heat will fry a human, and shivers in fear at lightning storms.*

A strange compassion came over Kettridge. How very much like a native of Earth this alien creature was. Governed by its stomach and will to survive and dominated by a religion founded in fear and nurtured on terror! Lightning—the beast thought of as a Screamer From the Skies. The occasionally-glimpsed sun was The Great Warmer.

Kettridge pondered on the simplicity and primitive common sense of Lad-nar's religion.

When the storms gathered, when they finally built up sufficient potential to generate the lightning and thunder, Lad-nar knew that the cold would set in. Cold was anathema to him. He knew that the cold sapped him of strength, and that the lightning struck him down.

So he stole a cat-litter, and hid himself for weeks—until the gigantic storms abated. The high body heat of the creature dictated that it must have a great deal of food to keep it alive when the temperature went down. When a cat-litter wasn't available, the logical alternative was to *kill and eat an alien ecologist.*

This was no stupid being, Kettridge reminded himself.

Its religion was a sound combination of animal wisdom and native observation. The lightning killed. Don't go abroad in the storms. The storms brought cold. Get food and stay alive.

It was indeed strange how a terrifying situation could bring a man to a realization of himself.

Here is a chance, he thought. The words came unbidden.

Just four words. *Here is a chance.* An opportunity not only to survive—something he had long since stopped doing consciously—but a chance to redeem himself, if only in his own mind. Before him was an aborigine, a member of a dying race, a cower-

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ing creature of the caves. Before him was a creature afraid to walk in the storms for fear of the lightning, shackled by a primitive religion, and doomed forever, never to see the sky.

In that split moment Ben Kettridge devised a plan to save Lad-nar's soul.

There are times when men sum up their lives, take accounting and find themselves wanting. Lad-nar suddenly became a symbol of all the people who had been lost in the Mass Death. In the mind of an old and tired man, many things are possible.

I must get out of here! Ben Kettridge told himself, over and over. But more than that he knew that he must save the poor hulk before him. And in saving the creature he would save himself. Lad-nar had no idea what a star was. Well, Ben Kettridge would tell him. Here was a chance!

Kettridge moved up flat against the wall, his back straining with his effort to sink into the stone. Watching the Blestonian come to wakefulness was an ordeal of pure horror.

The huge body tossed and heaved as it rose. It sat erect from the thin, pinched waist and raised the massive wedge-shaped chest, the hideous head, the powerful neck and arms. A thin trickle of moisture dripped from a corner of its fanged mouth. It sat up and thought: *Lad-nar hungers.*

"Oh, God in Heaven, please let me have time! Please allow me this one *little* thing!"

Kettridge found himself with his hands clasped on his chest, his face raised to the roof of the cave. For the first time in his life he felt tears of appeal on his cheeks.

Thought: *you speak to the Lord of the Heaven.* Lad-nar seemed awed. It watched, its huge, brilliant eyes suddenly grown wide.

Kettridge thought at the beast. *Lad-nar! I come from the Lord of the Heaven. I can show you how to walk in the storms! I can show you how to—*

The creature's roar deafened Kettridge. Accompanying it came a mental scream! Kettridge felt himself lifted off the floor by the force of the blow to his mind, and hurled violently back against the rocks.

The aborigine leaped to his feet, threw his taloned hands upward and bellowed in rage.

Thought: *you speak that which is Forbidden! You say that which is Untrue. No human walks when the Essence-Stealer speaks in the night! You are a fearful thing! Lad-nar is afraid!*

"Heresy, I've spoken heresy!" Kettridge wanted to rip off the metal-plastic hood and tear his tongue from his mouth.

Thought: *yes, you have spoken that which is Unclean and Untrue!*

Kettridge cowered in fear. The creature was truly enraged now. How could it be afraid when it

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stood there so powerful and so massive?

Thought: *yes, Lad-nar is afraid! Afraid!*

Then the waves of fear hit Kettridge. He felt his head begin to throb: The tender fiber of his mind was being twisted and seared and buffeted. Burned and scarred forever with Lad-nar's terrible all-consuming fear.

Stop, stop, Lad-nar! I speak the truth! I will show you how to walk in the storm as I do.

He spoke then—softly, persuasively, trying to convince a being that had never known any god but a deity that howled and slashed in streamers of electricity. He spoke of himself, and of his powers. He spoke of them as though he truly believed in them. He built himself a glory on two levels.

Slowly Lad-nar became calmer, and the waves of fear diminished to ripples. The awe and trembling remained, but there was a sliver of belief in the creature's mind now.

Kettridge knew he must work on that.

"I come from the Heaven-Home, Lad-nar. I speak as a messenger from the sky. I am stronger than the puny Essence-Stealer you fear!" As if to punctuate his words, a flash of lightning struck just outside the cave, filling the hollow with fury and light.

Kettridge continued, speaking faster and faster. "I can walk abroad in the storm, and the Essence-Stealer will not harm me. Let me go out and I will show you, Lad-nar."

He was playing a dangerous hand; at any moment the creature might leap. It might dare to venture upon a leap, hoping that Kettridge was speaking falsely, and preferring not to incur the wrath of a god he *knew* to be dangerous.

Thought: *stop!*

"Why, Lad-nar? I can show you how to walk in the night, when the Essence-Stealer screams. I can show you how to scream back at him, and to laugh at him too.

Kettridge reminded himself that the creature was indeed clever. Not only did it fear the wrath of the Lord of the Heaven and his screaming death. It knew that if it let the man go he would have nothing to eat during the coming cold days.

"Let me go, Lad-nar. I will bring you back a cat-litter for your feasting. I will show you that I can walk in the night and I will bring you food. I will bring back a cat-litter, Lad-nar!"

Thought: *if you are what you say, why do you speak to the Lord of the Heaven?*

Kettridge bit his lip. He kept forgetting . . .

"Because I want the Lord of the Heaven to know that I am as great as he," he said. "I want him to know I am not afraid of him, and that my prayers to him are only to convince him that I am as great as he." It was gibberish, but

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he hoped that if he kept talking the creature would shuck off the thoughts rather than try to fathom them.

The Earthman knew he had one factor in his favor: Lad-nar had never before heard anyone speak against his own god, and to do so with impunity immeasurably strengthened Kettridge's hand.

Kettridge hit Lad-nar with the appeal again, before the creature had time to wonder.

"I'll get you a cat-litter, Lad-nar. Let me go! Let me show you! Let me show you that you can walk in the storms as I do!"

Thought: *you will go away.*

There was a petulance, a little child sound, to the objection, and Kettridge knew the first step had been achieved.

"No, Lad-nar. Here is a rope." He drew a thin cord of tough metal-plastic from his utility belt. His hand brushed against his service revolver and he laughed deep in his mind once more as he thought of how useless it had become.

He would not have used the gun in any case. Only by his wits could he hope to win through to victory. There was more at stake now than mere self-preservation.

"Here is a rope," he repeated, extending the coiled cord. "I will tie it about myself. See—like this. You take the other end. If you hold it tightly I can't escape. It is long enough to enable me to go out and seek a cat-litter, and to convince you that I can walk abroad."

At first Lad-nar refused, eying the glistening, silvery cord with fear in his heavily-lidded eyes. But Kettridge spoke on two levels, and soon the creature touched the cord.

It drew back its seven-taloned hand quickly. It tried again.

The third time it grasped the cord.

You have just lost your religion, Kettridge thought.

Lad-nar had "smelled" with his mind. He had sensed a cat-litter fairly close to the cave. But he did not know where the living food supply had taken refuge.

Kettridge emerged from the dark mouth of the cave into the roaring maelstrom of a Blestonian electrical storm.

The sky was a tumult of heavy black clouds, steel and ebony and ripped dirty cloth. The clouds revolved in dark masses and were split apart by the lightning. The very air was charged, and blast after blast sheared away the atmosphere in zig-zagging streamers.

Kettridge stood with his legs apart, and his body tilted forward against the pull of the cord. He was forced to shade his eyes against the almost continuous glare of the lightning.

He was a small, thin man, and had it not been for the cord he might easily have been swept away by the winds and rain that sandpapered the rocky ledge.

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Kettridge stood there with the pelting rain washing over him, obobscuring his vision through the hood, and leaving only the glare of the storm to guide him.

He took a short step forward.

A bolt slashed at him through a rift in the mountains and roared straight toward him. It materialized out of nowhere and everywhere—shattering a massive slab of granite almost at his feet. Kettridge fell flat on his stomach and the crack of thunder rolled on past him.

The effect on his body was terrifying.

Immediately he went deaf. His legs and hips became numb, and his eyes reflected corruscating pinwheels of brilliance.

Thought: *The Essence-Stealer has screamed and you have fallen!*

The rope tightened and Kettridge felt himself being drawn back into the cave.

"No!" he protested desperately. The pressure eased. "No, Lad-nar. That was the Essence-Stealer's scream. Now I shall make my power felt. Let me show you, Lad-nar!"

Kettridge seized on the lightning blast for his own purpose. "See, Lad-nar! The Essence-Stealer has struck me, but I am still whole. I will rise and walk again."

Everywhere the lightning burned and crashed. The whole world seemed filled with the noise of crashing trees and screaming elements.

He arose shakily to his knees. His legs were weak and numb. But his eyes were starting to focus again. At least he could see now. He half-rose, sank back to one knee, and rose again. His head felt terribly heavy and unanchored.

Finally he stood erect.

And he walked.

The storm raged about him. Lightning struck and struck again, but his courage did not desert him.

Soon he came back to the cave.

Thought: *you are a god! This I believe. But the Lord of the Heaven has sent his Essence-Stealers. They, too, are mighty, and Lad-nar will lose his Essence if he walks there.*

"No, Lad-nar. I will show you how to protect yourself." Kettridge was sweating and weak from his walk, and the numbness extended through his entire body. He could hear nothing, but the words came clearly to him.

Very deliberately he began to unseal the form-fitting suit. In a few minutes he had it off, and it had shrunk back to a pocket-sized replica of the full-sized garment. The storm had lowered the temperature almost to freezing point.

"Lad-nar, take this," Kettridge said. "Here, give me your hand."

The creature looked at him with huge, uncomprehending eyes. The Earthman felt closer, somehow, to this strange creature than to anyone he had ever known in all the lonely years of his exile. Kettridge pulled his glove on tighter and

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reached for Lad-nar's seven-taloned hand. He pulled at the arm of the form-fit suit, and it elastically expanded, stretching to twice its original width.

After much stretching and fitting, the creature was encased in the insulating metal-plastic.

Kettridge had an impulse to laugh at the bunched fur and awkward stance of the massive animal. But again, the laughter would not come.

"Now, Lad-nar, put on the gloves. Never take them off, except when the storms are gone. You must always put this suit on when the Essence-Stealers scream. Then you will be safe."

Thought: *now I can walk in the night?*

"Yes—come." They moved together toward the cave's mouth. "Now you can get a cat-litter for yourself. I did not bring one because I knew you would believe me and get your own. Come, Lad-nar." He motioned him forward.

Thought: *how will you walk without the suit?*

Kettridge ran a seamed hand through his white hair. He was glad Lad-nar had thought the question. The multiple flashes of a many-stroked blast filled the air with glare and noise.

Kettridge could not hear the noise.

"I have brothers who wait for me in the Great House From Across the Skies that will take me back to the Heaven Home. They will hurry to me and they will protect me."

He did not bother to tell Lad-nar that his search-time was almost up and that the *Jeremy Bentham's* flitter would home in on his suit beam.

"Go! Walk, Lad-nar!" he said, throwing his arms out. "And tell your brothers you have screamed at the Essence-Stealers!"

Thought: *I have done this.*

Lad-nar stepped cautiously toward the rocky ledge, fearful and hesitant. Then it bunched its huge muscles and leaped out into the full agony of the storm which crashed in futility about his massive form.

"One day Man will come and make friends with you, Lad-nar," said Kettridge softly. "He will come down out of the sky and show you how to live on this world of yours so that you won't have to hide."

Kettridge sank down against the inner wall of the cave, suddenly too exhausted to stand.

He had won. He had redeemed himself—if only in his own mind. He had helped take away life from a race, but now—he had given life to a race.

He closed his eyes peacefully. Even the great blasts of blind lightning did not bother him as he rested. He knew Lad-nar had told his brothers.

He knew the ship would be coming for him.

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Lad-nar came up the incline and saw the flitter streaking down, with lightning playing along its sides in phosphorescent glimmers.

Thought: *your brothers come for you!*

He bounded across the scarred and seared rocks toward the cave.

Kettridge rose and stepped out into the rain and wind.

He ran a few steps, waving his arms in a signaling gesture. The flitter altered its course and headed for him, its speed increasing with great rapidity.

The lightning struck.

It seemed as though the bolt knew its target. It raced the flitter, sizzling and burning as it came. In a roar of light and fire it tore at Kettridge, lifting him high into the air, and carrying him far from Lad-nar.

His body landed just outside the cave, blistered and charred but still struggling.

Thought: *you have fallen! Rise, rise, rise! The Essence-Stealers . . .*

The thoughts were hysterical, tearful, torn and wanting. Had Lad-nar been able to shed tears, Kettridge knew it would have wept unashamedly. The old man lay sightless, his eyes gone, his senses altogether torn from him. The Essence ebbed.

He thought: *Lad-nar. Others will come. They will come to you and you must think to them. You must think these words, Lad-nar. Think to them,* SHOW ME A STAR. *Do you hear me, Lad-nar? Do you . . .*

Even as Lad-nar watched, the Essence flickered and died. In the creature's mind there was a lack, an abyss of emptiness. Yet there was also contentment. A strange peace and Lad-nar knew the Essence of the God Who Walked In the Night was strong and unafraid at Ending.

The aborigine stood on the rocks below the cave and watched the flitter sink to the stone ledge. He watched as the other Gods From the Skies emerged and ran to the charred body on the stones.

Through his head, like the blind lightning streaking everywhere, the words remained, and repeated . . .

Thought: *Show me a star.*

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the triangulated izaak walton

by . . . Mack Reynolds

For generations "The Compleat Angler" has been the fisherman's inspired guide. But the stranger had some eerily unorthodox ideas.

BUCK WILLARD was sitting on that old cypress stump down near Dupont's little municipal dock when Otis Martin and his party drove up. Otis unloaded the car, got the kicker out of the rumble compartment, and started straightening out about seven different kinds of tackle while the others just stood around and watched. He had two men in his party but they didn't make any attempt to help Otis with the gear.

One of the Yankees said to Buck, "You trying for the big bass contest prize, Buck?"

And Buck said, "Might."

The Yankee said, "That twenty-five horse outboard makes a nice first prize."

"I could use me a new kicker," Buck said.

He wasn't just a whistlin' Dixie, neither. One of the reasons Buck wasn't doing so good this season was on account of the old kicker he had. Nobody wants to pay out twenty good bucks for a guide and then have to put up with being stranded up the river from sunup to sundown.

Having collaborated with famed mystery expert Fredric Brown in all kinds of writing weather, Mack Reynolds may well have donned a southeaster and gone on a fishing expedition with Mr. Brown too. And since both writers have such an amazing knack for standing the universe on its head, it is pleasant to imagine Mr. Brown chuckling over this yarn, gesturing toward his rod and reel and offering to tell an even taller one. Only—we doubt that it could be done!

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Otis said, "We all better hope Buck doesn't get into the contest. If Buck catches hisself a eight pounder he'll talk it up to double that size."

The other Yankee laughed and said, "Buck, did you ever see that sea serpent again? The one you was telling us about last winter?"

Buck said, kind of mild, "It might've been a manatee, I ain't denyin'. But if so, it was a mighty queer manatee."

Otis grunted, "If you ask me, Buck was drinking mighty queer shine. Let's go, gents. We've been held up long enough."

They climbed into the new boat Otis had rented for the season and he give his kicker no more than two jerks and they was off. Those two Yankees had been Buck's customers last season.

Buck just sat there on the stump awhile and looked out over the river and wondered a few things—like whether or not they was biting best up on the flats or all the way into Lake Dexter, and when the coot and ducks would begin to come in, and whether they had any decent sized bait up at the shiner camp. It was getting kind of late and it didn't look like he was going to get a party. He thought maybe he'd go on over to the store and see if Evelyn would put three, four cans of beer on his bill. Probably she wouldn't.

That was when this stranger came up. He was tall and he talked like some kind of a foreigner. From some foreign country I mean—not just the North.

He walks up and Buck decides that he's seen some queer clothes on the tourists that come down every winter. But he'll be dog if he has ever seen an outfit like this.

The stranger says, "How would I go about hiring a boat and a guide? I want to catch a bass but I haven't much time."

Buck says, "I'm a guide." But he adds, kind of discouraged like, "you are supposed to have your own tackle. I don't supply no tackle—just the boat and kicker and shiners."

The stranger holds up a tiny little case he's carrying and says he's got his equipment with him. But he doesn't need any shiners. He'll use a plug.

"Not on the St. Johns, Mister," Buck tells him. "Plugs ain't much good around here. We fish with live bait, shiner minnows."

"Not me," the stranger says, "where's your boat?"

Buck's been a guide for maybe twenty years but he never argues with sportsmen which know more about fishin' than he does. He figures they pay their money for him to guide and if they want to take their own advice instead of his it's all right with him. He says, "That's my boat—right over there. Wait'll I bail it out a mite."

"That tub?" the stranger says. He takes in the kicker. "Will that rusty old washing machine get us there and back? I have only four

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hours." He looks down at the fancy watch on his wrist. "Three hours and forty-five minutes, to be exact."

"That's not much time to fish," Buck says, bailing. "But we might get one or two. I think we ought to have shiners, though. Plugs ain't much good along here, Mister."

"We'll try mine anyway," the stranger says, getting into the boat. "What's your name?"

"Buck Willard," Buck says, taking in the anchor and then fixing to start up his old kicker.

"Buck Willard! I'll be treyed! You're the liar who put his name on my mounted bass."

Buck looks at him. He don't specially mind being called a liar since it's been his undeserved reputation for a long time. But he had never seen this sapsucker before in his life.

He says, kind of mild, "I never seen your mounted bass, Mister. How could I put my name on it?"

"Not yet," the stranger muttered, sore as a chigger bite. "But you will, trey it."

Buck finally gets his kicker going and they start up the river, pushing through the hyacinths and the lily pads until they get into the river current. Not that there's much current in the St. Johns. Florida being flat like it is, the river only drops nine feet in more than a hundred miles on its way down to Jacksonville.

They are maybe half a mile up the river from Dupont when the kicker sputters five, or six times and conks out.

Buck says, apologetic, "She stopped on us."

"So I see," the stranger says, and he isn't exactly enthusiastic, "What do you have to do to start it again?"

Buck fishes out his tool box. "I'll tinker around," he says. "I'll have her going in no time atall."

The stranger says, looking down at the doodad watch of his, "I have exactly three hours in which to fish. Just how far is it to the beds?"

Buck says, pointing with his wrench, "I was first going to take you up there to the island. See where that old barge is—sunk last year in the hurricane? Right off the north end of her the fishin's good." He turns and points to the other side the river. "And over there spoon trolling alongside them hyacinths might be good for a bass. We oughta have shiners though, and I don't know what you got in mind without no rod."

"I have a rod," the stranger says opening up his little box and pulling out a gadget maybe the size of his fist. While Buck watches him he pushes a little jigger on the side, and *whoosh,* about five feet of rod telescopes out of the end.

"I'll be dog," Buck says. "What will they think of next? What *will* they think of."

The stranger takes another gadget, maybe half the size of the first one, and attaches it on the end of his rod. Buck decided it looked

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something like a reel—only there wasn't no line on it.

Next out of the little case, no bigger than a tackle box, comes a plug Buck figures is the most natural looking shiner plug he has ever laid eyes on.

Buck says, "They sure are doing them up good these days. Look at them teeny scales. Can't tell it from a real shiner."

"Smells, and feels, and tastes like one too," the stranger grunts. He takes the plug and tosses it into the water, with no line at all on it. Buck pops his eyes, half ready to dive into the river after it. He knows he'll never again see such a natural looking little plug, one costing maybe three dollars the way prices are.

But the stranger ups with his rod and says to Buck, "Did you say the north end of that sunken barge?"

And Buck says, "Yep, sure did." And he looks over at the half-sunk barge maybe a quarter mile up the river.

So the stranger says, "Well, while you're repairing the engine we'll give it a try," and he flicks his wrist. He does it very careful, like as though he'd been practicing for years. "I'll be treyed," he says. "Made it on the first cast."

Buck puts down his wrench and says, "Made what, Mister?"

But his party is bent over his little tackle box again, humming happy like. He sets the box up on one of the seats and lets down one side and there is a few knobs and a little screen maybe five inches long by four inches high. It looks like one of them television screens they have in the bars over Deland way.

He messes around with the knobs a mite and pretty soon the screen lights up and there on it is a underwater scene. You can see the bottom sides of hyacinth bulbs, and some sunken wreckage in the background and about thirty catfish swimming around, and looking more like mud cat than channel.

"Portable television set," Buck says, surprised. "Never heard of them being for sale yet."

The stranged said, "I don't see any bass."

Buck keeps watching the screen. There ain't any television sets in Dupont and he hasn't looked at it much. There ain't no commentator or anybody else talking on this show. Just this one underwater scene. Somehow or other Buck thinks maybe he's seen the show before. But he can't for the life of him figure where.

His party says, "Over near those hyacinths too, eh? There doesn't seem to be any bass near the barge. I'll try it over there." He presses some doodad on his reel and Buck sees that the little shiner plug is back at the side of the boat. The stranger flicks the rod again and the plug is gone and the stranger says, "Trey it, too short."

"What's too short?" Buck says. The television set had gone blank for a minute and was still blank.

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Some kind of static, Buck figures.

"Cast too short. I'll swim it over."

Buck goes back to his kicker figuring what the hell.

Pretty soon he looks up again and there's another underwater scene, still without sound. It's like the camera is going underwater along the edge of a hyacinth bed.

Buck sits up all of a sudden and says, "Where's that pitcher coming from, Mister?"

The stranger is watching the TV screen close and jiggling around with his reel a mile a minute. He says, from the side of his mouth, "Over where you told me, near those hyacinths. I can't see any bass there either."

Buck looks at him, then at the hyacinths, maybe four, five hundred yards away. Then he stares at the little TV screen. He says, "How . . . ?"

All of a sudden, he can see a bass in the TV screen. You know how a bass looks under water—like you see them over to Silver Springs when you go cruising about in one of them glass bottom boats. Well, that's what he looked like. He was big, too, but Buck couldn't tell how big.

Buck can see straight off Mr. Bass ain't particular hungry. He's just layin' there by his lonesome watching out from under them hyacinths.

Buck's party kind of snorts under his breath and jiggles some more on his reel and the bass gets bigger and bigger—like the camera which was taking the picture was getting closer and closer.

So pretty soon the bass moves his under jaw, and you can see his side fins begin to twitch, and you can see he has decided to do something.

Then, *bam,* the screen goes blank and Buck hears a splash way over by them hyacinths and the stranger yells, "Got him, trey it!" and hauls back on his rod.

The next fifteen minutes the stranger is hauling around and pulling and fiddling around with that rod and reel of his with no line on it like he had the granddaddy of all fish ready to land, scale and fry. Only, like I said, there wasn't no line—not to speak of no bait and no caught fish.

Buck just sits there and blinks at him. He has been out with some tourists before who were crazy as coots. But he has never seen anything like this. He figures maybe he better hit the stranger over the head with a oar and get him back to the dock. But then he figures with his kicker on the blink the way it was he wouldn't be able to get to the dock before the stranger woke up again. Then he'd have to whack him again and he didn't know how many times he might have to whack the sapsucker altogether since he didn't know how long it might take to get the kicker fixed. So he just sits there and watches.

By and by the stranger gives a

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grunt and says, out of breath like, "There, can you get him?"

Buck looks down where his party is looking and there by the side of the boat is the granddaddy of all bass. He's a twenty-five pounder, all tuckered out, and with this here plug stuck in his jaw.

Buck reaches down real quick, automatic, and grabs the bass through the mouth and gills the way you grab a bass and hauls him into the boat. Mr. Bass has only half a dozen more flops in him he's so tuckered out.

Buck gets the plug out of the bass' mouth and hands it to the stranger and then he says, "You a Roosian? I sure got my suspicions!"

The stranger is looking happy as a pig in slop and breathing real deep and fast. He finally looks at Buck and kind of frowns and says, "Don't be silly, I'm a First Class American, DeLuxe Status."

Buck points and says, "Where'd you get that there equipment?"

"I *said* I was DeLuxe Status," the stranger says, kind of huffy but still happy about the fish and not exactly concentrating on what he is saying. "It was issued to me upon my request."

He looks down at his watch and looks kind of worried now. He says, anxious, "How long before you can get that motor going? I must be getting back."

Buck puts the wrench down and says, "I ain't stirring until I find out what kind of tackle you got there and whereabouts you come from. I heard tell on the radio about all kinds of scientists being around these days and most of them you can't trust—what with bombs and spies and everything."

Well, they argued a spell, but I won't bother you with all the details, and the stranger kept looking at his watch and getting more and more nervous. Finally he says, "It won't make any difference anyway, it's already been checked. Ask any questions you wish and I'll answer them."

"Where you from?" Buck said, and now he knew he had him where he wanted him.

"To speed this up," the stranger replies, "I'll tell you right now that your question should be 'When are you from?' and the answer is the year two thousand eighty-four A.D. And the answers to a good many other questions it would take you an hour to get around to are: One—I am a time traveler. Two—I am an inveterate fisherman of the future who has spent half his life-credits assignment to clear four hours of this space-time continuum to the point where it becomes possible for me to return and fish the best bass waters of all time. This equipment that I have is standard in our era, although there is treyed little use to which it can be put."

Buck didn't get much more than half of that. But he said, "How does it work?"

"How would I know? I'm a member of the DeLuxe Status."

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"Well," Buck says, "you know enough to operate it."

So the stranger takes a quick look at his watch again and groans and goes over it real quick. "This is a power reel with a built-in mini-pile. It will cast up to five miles. Sonar-radar control of the plug, of course. The camera lenses are built into the eyes of the bait, so that the angler can seek out his fish. The teevee screen here, picks up the broadcast."

Buck got that pretty good since they was talking about his field now, and he knew that what the stranger was saying was right because he'd seen it happen, every bit of it, even if five miles was a mite on the bragging side when it came to accurate casting. Buck had done some stretching of fishing stories himself in his time and he knew how it was done.

He thought about it awhile and said, "It ain't possible to travel back in time. Even if you could, what would happen if you went and killed your own grandpappy back when he was a little boy?"

"You know," the stranger says, looking down at his watch, real nervous, "I've wondered about that myself."

While they was talking Buck had cleaned up the spark plugs and reset the magneto and now he took the starter rope and wound her around and gave her a tug. It nearly caught the first time. He hit the choke button two, three times. Then he wound the rope again and this time it caught up as sweet as could be.

"Well, Mister," he said, just as though they hadn't had no argument at all, "shall we look up some other bass to try that there equipment on? When you got bait that will go out looking for its own fish you got it licked."

"There's no time," the stranger mutters, desperate like. "I've got to get back. I have only four hours cleared. Anything might happen."

Well, sir, Buck would have liked to have seen that automatic shiner plug with its built-in TV work again. But a bargain is a bargain, so he turns the boat around and heads back for the dock.

As soon as the prow hits shore the stranger jumps out, at the same time reaching for his hip. For a minute Buck thinks he's going for a pocket gun. But the stranger comes out with a wallet and says, "I had a difficult time finding currency of this era, but here you are. My investigations indicate that this is considerably more than your usual fee. I shall expect you to do but one thing to earn the additional amount."

Buck takes the money and finds out it's a well-worn hundred dollar bill which is more money than Buck has seen in a month of Sundays. He looks at it real close because he figures he's got good and sufficient reason not to exactly trust this stranger.

The stranger has set off, even

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as he's finishing talking to Buck over his shoulder.

"Hey, your bass," Buck calls after him.

"Can't take it with me," the stranger yells. "I want you to mount it. It's the biggest bass ever caught. Have it mounted and I'll recover it from a museum in my own time. I'd be wasting my breath if I asked you to put my name on the engraving plate instead of your own." He mutters something nasty under his breath about that.

All of a sudden, Buck sees something wrong with the bill. "Hey!" he yells, "this says Series of Nineteen Sixty. This is only nineteen fifty-six!"

"The calibration of that treyed time machine must be off," the stranger yells back at him. "I thought it was the year nineteen sixty. You'll have to keep it for five years until it's good."

Buck is still sitting there staring in disgust at the bill when Otis Martin and his party comes in. He sticks the bill in his pocket quick, not knowing just what kind of laws they have about counterfeiting. But he did know that nobody's going to get away with passing any money five years before it's printed.

Otis and the Yankees are in pretty high fettle. While Otis unloads the boat, the Yankees keep telling each other how they caught this one and how they caught that one. And how the other one got away.

Otis says kind of sly, while he's carrying tackle up to the car, "You should have gone out for a crack at that bass prize, Buck. They're bitin' today."

"I was out for awhile," Buck says, still thinking about it all.

"Catch anything?" one of the Yankees asks, not really interested.

Buck looks at him and says, "Right here in my boat I got the biggest bass ever caught in this river." It had just come to him real sudden that was what it mounted up to.

Otis kind of groans and says, "Here we go again."

Buck doesn't argue none. He just opens the live well and hauls the bass out and there it is. Twenty-five pounds—and more they find out it goes later on.

Well, you can imagine how excited those Yankees got, and Otis too for that matter—though he tried to hide it some.

They take it over to the store and weigh it and Evelyn says, "Buck, you'll have to get it mounted up. We can hang it here in the store and people will come along and see it and they'll all want to fish here and they'll all want you for a guide."

Buck says, "I was thinking some of mounting it up. Tell you the truth, it was caught under strange circumstances."

Otis kind of groaned again and it wasn't just on account of he knew Buck would have a fish story to end all fish stories and had the evidence to back him up. Otis knew Buck

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would have all the guiding he could handle for the rest of his life, not to speak of winning the big new kicker prize which Otis had his eye on.

Everybody else, though, was all keen to hear the telling and one of the Yankees bought beer all around and they settled down for Buck's story.

Buck says, "Ain't much to it. Gents, you'll never believe it but to be utterly truthful I never had this bass on a line atall. The way I caught him I just naturally reached into the river, grabbed him through the mouth and gills and hauled him into the boat."

There was a sort of silence.

"You mean he was dead?" One of the Yankees said.

Buck says, indignant, "Dead? This here bass put up a fifteen, twenty minute fight."

There was another silence.

Buck was feeling kind of wild inside. He had that there hundred dollar bill in his pocket for proof if he wanted to tell the whole story. But sure as he dragged it out he'd lose the spending of it, not to speak of losing the kicker and also the glory of catching the biggest bass ever seen in these or any other parts.

It just seemed there was no way Buck could lose that reputation of his.

A rewrite man on a city newspaper unearths an astounding item of buried news—and a miracle man walks on water and emerges dryshod on the blazing frontiers of the unknown

THE REWRITE MAN

By WARD MOORE

The ever-resourceful author of THE SCARF *explores even stranger realms of terror and dark surmise in an alternate time story of great men on tetherhooks in Independence Square*

THE FOUNDING FATHERS

By ROBERT BLOCH

in the next issue

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lights out for rosalie

by . . . Ethel G. Lewis

They were too incredibly happy in their cramped little home to realize that a monster had mistaken them for Mother Hubbard.

WHEN ROSALIE MILLER first broached the subject of the disappearing food to her husband she was carefully tactful. They had been married for only ten months and the rites of tenderness, consideration and love-names were still zealously performed without self-conscious effort. An instructor in Science to a freshman college class, Bob Miller disliked being interrupted when he was marking examination papers. There was a huge pile of such papers in front of him now and Rosalie tentatively cleared her throat.

"Darling," she said.

"Mmm?". He did not lift his head, but his brows contracted slightly.

"Oh, I know this sounds stingy, darling. But our budget really won't stand it, you know."

Bob Miller looked up suddenly. "You sound so serious," he said, his face still set in concentration.

"What I mean is—" She broke off guiltily, remembering how lovingly he had kissed her when he had come home late that afternoon. She had to force herself to go on.

Not many writers could take what is perhaps the oldest basic idea in science fiction, and transform it into a polished gem of a story with a sparkling, indefinable atmosphere of complete newness and hair-raising catch-a-monster-by-the-tail appeal. Ethel G. Lewis has been a quite successful contributor to the little reviews and to be successful in that highly discriminating field is never easy. We're glad that the word "literary" doesn't at all frighten her.

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"Bobby dear, if you get hungry at night, couldn't you just take a drink of water instead?"

A smile began to tug at the serious lines of his mouth. "Instead of what, honey-bun?" he asked.

"Instead of raiding the refrigerator, darling. I had intended that left-over hamburger for tonight's dinner. When I found you'd eaten it I had to buy a can of salmon. Salmon isn't exactly cheap these days, either."

Bob shook his dark head, the look in his eyes going very soft for an instant.

"You're knocking at the wrong door, Baby," he said. "I didn't raid the refrigerator. I slept without waking once last night."

"Oh," Rosalie said, her eyes wide and incredulous.

Why was Bob lying? He had never lied to her before. He could so easily have said he wouldn't do it again.

"Well, I didn't either," she said in a whisper. And the next instant, agitated because she was whispering, she raised her voice. "One of us had to!"

"Spooks!" Bob said, grinning. "Now, Ginger, let Papa do his homework, will you?"

She loved his calling her names like Ginger, Honey-Bun and Baby. What if he did persist in denying that he had eaten up the left-overs? Maybe he ate in his sleep—just as some people walked in theirs. The idea amused her, and she tried to shake off her preoccupation with the mysterious disappearance of the food.

"But—" she began, in spite of her resolve.

Bob's face went stern once more. "I have to finish these papers. As you well know, my dearest help-mate, on a morrow as inevitable as the sunrise I'll have to cope with these no-heads—otherwise called students. So let me finish my job before we talk or play riddles. Okay?"

He lowered his head once more and Rosalie sat looking at him in silence, her feelings working themselves into an inchoate mass. She was twenty-two and she looked up to and respected her husband, because he was twenty-nine and had gone a little gray at the temples and had lost three years of his life in the Pacific during World War II. Also, she loved him. He had been one of the last of the veteran students at the University where she was majoring in Psych.

He was her dream man come to life, and she had felt like shouting with pride when he carried off the two most coveted prizes in Science, and modestly refrained from crowing about it. They were already very much in love and planning to marry when the assistant professorship was offered to him. The salary was small, but—

He called her his Lady Luck as well as a luscious babe with brains. With high hopes that they could have a fine marriage they brought an abundance of mutual desire to

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their union, and things had up until now been going quite well.

It was to their credit, she told herself, that they were still in love despite several months of cramped living in this crowded little place. They had set up housekeeping in her apartment in order to save enough money to buy a small ranch house a mere thirty minutes' drive from the college.

So—all the home they had known was what she humorously termed their "common room," a fifteen by thirteen area in which they spent their waking hours, eating, reading, kissing and talking.

There was an alcove with a built-in bed for sleeping, over by the window. In six short steps they could cross to a tiny space imaginatively called a kitchen which boasted a window which opened on a fire escape. A bathroom with all of the requisite fixtures in a minimal amount of space completed the blissful marital arrangement.

But they seemed not to get in each other's way, and now as her reverie ended Rosalie pulled her thoughts up sharply. A successful marriage had to be worked at persistently she told herself. Bob was busy and it was up to her to drop a subject that could lead to controversy. She must have forgotten eating the hamburger for her own lunch! If Bob was *not* lying, there was no other possible explanation. She began to yawn, and decided to get ready for bed.

Beyond a wink from Bob at the precise instant when she slid in between the sheets and looked toward him longingly there was no more between them that night.

The next evening, however, Rosalie found herself bringing the subject up again. She had no choice, she told herself, fighting the crazy thunder of her heart, and feeling almost physically ill.

"Darling," she said, "I must talk to you." Bob was reading, but he glanced up at once, his finger wedged securely in a vital section of the book.

"Yes, honey-bun," he said.

"I never *hear* you get up. I won't deny that," she said. "But if you're hungry at night, couldn't you munch a carrot?"

"What, again?" Bob almost shouted.

He had never shouted at her before. Now, quite visibly his face got red. "Girl, you've got an obsession. Haven't I assured you I never go in for raiding the refrigerator? Not even when I was a lad in the wilds of Brooklyn did I raid a refrigerator. Look, baby—" He smiled and leaned forward. "What is all this about anyhow?"

"I'm getting scared," she confessed. "Somebody is *eating up our food.*"

For a moment there was silence and then Bob closed the book. He stood up. With tender solicitude he went to her, bent and kissed her lips.

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"Maybe you ought to see a doctor," he said anxiously.

It was her turn to become indignant. "Are you telling me I'm not mentally fit?" she demanded.

Bob began to laugh. He took a few steps and then looked at her smilingly. "We've got a built-in gremlin or a Martian or something," he said.

She could not afterwards name the exact moment when the fear came to birth inside her. She only knew that it was a corrosive emotion. She should have perhaps understood it better, since she had majored in Psych and had been an A student.

"Could you—" She stopped, swallowed and then continued. "Darling, could you have concocted a *creature* out of that blob of protoplasm you've got under study?"

"Creature?" Bob shook his head, smiling broadly. "I couldn't concoct a worm from what I've been messing around with. And I haven't been near the lab for weeks."

The laboratory was in the bathroom, and calling it a "lab" was one of their private jokes. For want of a better working arrangement in the apartment, Bob had placed a narrow shelf on two metal brackets over the bathtub. When you stood up in the tub, the shelf was about chest high.

They had learned not to bump their heads on it when getting out of the tub. And they had been especially careful since a certain night two weeks before when Bob had become momentarily forgetful. He had hit his head hard, and had upset the paraphernalia.

At first Bob swore, but after cleaning up, had decided that nothing was missing and that no real harm had been done. He had reassembled the apparatus and they had both forgotten the incident.

That, Rosalie now realized with sudden dread, had been their mistake. They ought not to have forgotten about Bob's knocking over the shelf. Something had escaped from his test tube!

She sprang to her feet and ran to her husband, whose arms went quickly around her.

"I'm scared! Oh, Bob, something did get lost."

"What are you talking about?" he demanded. His hands tightened on her shoulders and then, suddenly, she felt the fear begin in him too. "How long has this disappearing food act been going on?" he asked in a low voice.

"About a week, I think," she told him. "I hated to say anything to you."

"A prowler might be getting in through the kitchen window," he said, his gaze traveling toward the kitchenette space. There was no real conviction in his voice.

She swallowed hard against the great lump that was rising in her throat. "But darling, you lock that window every night. I see you. I watch you lock that window *every*

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single night and there's never been any broken glass. If anyone wanted to get in he'd simply have to break the window, and darling, we would hear . . ."

Her voice stopped abruptly. What frightened her now was the fact of Bob's fear. When she looked up at him the paleness of his face shocked her. As if dazed, he was shaking his head. "It just couldn't be," he muttered, glancing in the direction of the bathroom. And then explosively he cried out, "Let's get out of here, Rosie!"

He caught her against him, so close that she could feel the shudders running through his body. "My God!" he said over her head, pressing her face against him in a gesture of protectiveness. "My God!" And now there was no explosiveness in his voice but only a terrified incredulity.

She forced herself to ask against the rising constriction in her throat, "When you bumped into the lab something got away, and concealed itself somewhere. Didn't it, Bob? Didn't it?" Her voice was turning into a scream.

He quieted a little as her fear intensified his desire to protect and reassure her. "Steady," he urged. "Steady, honey-bun. Something happened apparently. I didn't believe anything would. I had given the . . . thing—it was the size of a pin-point—a shot. Call it a hormone extract—what does the name matter?

"The shot *could* have activated the specimen. A new gimmick. I didn't really believe in it. I considered it to be a long shot." He groaned, holding her more tightly. "And that's the part that was missing when I picked up the lab. I hadn't even given it a thought."

His breath was terrible to hear as he tried to control it. He might have been running a long, harrowing race.

"Stay right where you are," he said suddenly. "I'm going to look for it."

He began a crazy, unthinking search, involving much noise and a total upheaval in the apartment, with every bit of furniture overturned.

He even went down on his hands and knees and looked under the sink, the stove, the cupboards. A broom clattered on the floor as he pulled open a narrow closet which housed a dustbin as well. The dustbin he overturned. In a fever of movement he did not stop until he had scrutinized every inch of the floor, and thrown wide every closed space.

And then, in utter exhaustion, he turned to his wife. "Come on. We're not staying."

Rosalie felt herself to be more ice than flesh and blood. "We can't," she said. "We'd wonder for the rest of our lives. And you would never again have the courage to attempt another experiment. It couldn't be big enough to hurt us, Bob. How could it be?"

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She leaned toward him, her eyes pleading with him. "It would have to be small!"

He shook his head grimly, tugging at his hair with one hand. "I don't know. Rosie, I honestly don't know what size it may have reached in the ten days it has been free. I did it for fun! I never even secured data on it."

He caught her to him again, muttering in bitter self-reproach, "Fool, fool, criminal fool—"

She felt resolve harden within her. "We'll make a test," she said slowly. "There was a chicken leg left over from dinner. We'll put out the lights. We'll wait."

They sat on their bunk bed, holding hands tightly in the darkness. They waited. They lost track of time, but when Rosalie felt her eyelids growing heavy, she knew it must be late. And in that instant, as she fought with herself to stay awake, the first thump came.

She counted the thumps as Bob's fingers closed convulsively on hers. There were eight rhythmic thuds, and then the sound of the refrigerator door swinging open. Next came the sound of the door closing. Eight thumps followed, and then nothing but silence with the gasp of their own breathing to heighten the horror of not knowing.

Bob stood up. "I'm going in there, and have a look," he said.

She sprang to his side, and they moved step by step toward the kitchen. Bob switched on the overhead light. Then, his jaw muscles twitching, he pulled open the refrigerator door and Rosalie looked in. The chicken leg was gone.

Bob slammed the door shut and caught her to him. "Come on," he shouted.

But now she had only one overmastering dread—that she would see the thing. She turned off the overhead light and would not move when Bob tried to propel her forward.

The sounds began again. The first thump came from the direction of the apartment door which opened on the outer hall. The door that knew neither fear nor hope, she found herself thinking in paradoxical mindlessness, was their only means of escape. Unless the kitchen window—

"The lamp!" Bob was shouting at her. "Turn on the lamp right beside you. Pull the cord!"

It was at that precise instant that she found her voice.

"No!" she screamed, not moving but letting the protesting words emerge from her throat without restraint. "I don't want to see it. No lights! *I don't want to see it!*"

Rosalie never did. Within two seconds of her hysterical outburst her husband lifted her from the floor, and simultaneously overthrew the standing lamp in the hope of stalling the progress of the monster.

Now in his mind's eye he could see it clearly. What he had de-

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scribed to Rosalie as a mere pinpoint of living matter had been a morsel of pig foetus a quarter of an inch square, an area ample for the spread and swift development of the activating fluid. He knew that if Rosalie once looked upon the result, she would in all likelihood never have another night of peaceful sleep. So he jabbed at the kitchen window with his elbow while Rosalie clung to him in a hush of horror.

He heard one more thump behind him just as he cleared the sill and gained the rusty iron fire escape. He clattered down, shouting hoarsely, unintelligibly but loudly enough for a neighborhood policeman to come at a run. Not much later, the fire department entered from the fire escape, their weapon a great hose spouting water.

One fireman fainted dead away at sight of the pink-hued, pig-resembling mass perched on the kitchen table. Another, of hardier stuff, simply directed the flow of water in a concentrated stream at the monster until it was helpless. He captured it in a net, and triumphantly toted his catch to the station.

Bob Miller, not long after, recovered his scientific detachment, and was able to view the captured specimen quite clinically while a brilliant idea for exploitation burgeoned in his mind. He became a lecturer.

Nowadays he tours the country accompanied by his prize, securely imprisoned in a heavily wired cage. Speaking before august groups of scientists from all over the world, he points out astonishing humanoid similarities in the configuration of the jaw and forehead of the monster. Bob has gained a reputation in the field of Scientific Research on Mutation. And Bob has become rather smug.

Sadly enough, the idyll of the Millers is declining. Rosalie is not happy, in spite of wearing mink and living in a fine house.

Could there be a moral in all of this? A caution against mutation experiment? A warning that the line between honest exploration and delving into the monstrous is too thin for ordinary comfort? Could some unspeakable instrument of vengeance be lying in wait, patient, purring, biding its time until more scientists yield to the temptation?

After all, it is such devilish fun to play God!

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the laugh

by . . . Robert Abernathy

To Dicky grownups were absurdly like ants. They worked hard for no good purpose. But some day a big, big change would be coming!

DICKY lay comfortably on his stomach in the high backyard weeds, watching the ants. His eyes darted back and forth, trying to see what all of them were doing at the same time—all around their hill on the sun-warmed bare slope by the weed patch.

But there were too many of them and they ran too fast in too many different directions. They skirmished, climbed, and slid. They pushed, lifted, and tugged at bits of straw, at seeds, and even the leg of a beetle. They labored mightily and inefficiently to transport these treasures to their nest. Dicky gazed at them in rapt absorption obscurely awed by their incomprehensible fervor of dedication.

They reminded him— He searched the teeming storehouse of a five-year-old's memories, and thought that the ants reminded him of the lawn-tender which, every evening when it wasn't raining, crept out of its little kennel behind the house to see if the grass needed cutting or watering. If it did, the dutiful machine went clicking and buzzing up and down on its fat wheels, pivoting precise-

If a lad of eight should get an urge to go tramping into a cosmic shoe-store in search of a giant's boots his egotism might become a frightening thing. Robert Abernathy probably hopes it won't happen. But he here plants such grave doubts in our *mind that we wonder if it's safe to spoil children.*

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ly at the edge of the yard. It never came down here, where the ground sloped toward the brook thirty yards away, and the weeds grew rank—where Dicky the courageous wasn't supposed to go either.

He glanced up the slope, suddenly conscious of the naked sun blazing down on him through the thin cover of foliage and of the nearness of the house beyond its clipped green rectangle of lawn. The cooling intake on the house roof turned slowly, flaring to snare an unreliable faint breeze. The windows had half-shuttered themselves against the July afternoon brilliance, and they now resembled squinting eyes. The eyes were dark with indoor shadow and you couldn't tell whether they were looking at you or not.

But if Mother did look out, she couldn't possibly see him here. She would think he was sitting in the sun by the wall of the house, playing as he was supposed to do with his toy cars or his toy helicopter. The cars would run just to the edge of the yard, and the helicopter would fly only as high as the house. So naturally Dicky had grown bored with them.

He wriggled closer to the busy ants, to the very edge of the weed forest. The ants went on behaving as if Dicky wasn't there. Softly, Dicky said, "Boo! Woo? *You!*" But the ants didn't notice.

Judicially, he decided that he would never be an ant, even if the opportunity should be offered him. Ants were like grownups. They worked hard for no good reason which Dicky could understand and they paid no attention to more important things.

But it *would* be fun to be very small, and live here among weeds like giant trees. It would be fun to hide under the leaves when people came looking for him. He scanned the ground minutely, picturing himself walking here and there among the wonders of the little world—climbing on a straw that was a fallen log, and looking up to see an insect go whirring past with iridescent wings. Then the slope would be a mountain, and the brook at its foot would become a vast shining ocean.

Not an ant, though. He would rather be a frog.

Vividly, for life, Dicky would remember the day when he'd first seen the frog. It had been back when there'd been a hole in the fence, hidden by weeds. It had been a hole which only he knew about, and several times he'd crawled through and visited the forbidden shores beyond. The brook flowed there dark, deep, and quiet between cement banks, severely walled like almost all the world. But under the footbridge a little way below the house lived the frog.

Dicky had known he was there, had heard him at twilight—*krraak! krraak!* But for a long time he hadn't known who made the sound. And then, one rain-washed

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afternoon, he'd crept stealthily along the wet grass of the bank and peered into the shadows beneath the bridge.

The frog was sitting on the slimed rubble close to the water—fat, green, self-important. He was squatting there with his tiny forefeet accurately tucked up under him. He had lazy jewel eyes, and was ballooning his mottled throat to send out his *krraak*. Smugly happy he seemed, in his confidence that the world had only been waiting to hear his frog noise.

The revelation had been too much for Dicky, and he had burst out laughing. Then he had looked quickly around, alarmed, to see if anyone had heard him. But nobody had except the frog, who promptly went *gchonk!* into the water.

Now the fence had been repaired and there was no way through. If Dicky so much as went near it—forbidden as he was to go that far—his father's voice came to his ears, just as if his father were not away at work. It said: "Dicky, go home!"

But Dicky didn't grieve unduly. Having found the way blocked, he dismissed it from his thoughts. After all, he had seen the frog, and he could remember it any time he wanted to.

Remembering now, he rose to a crouching position among the weeds, and said, "*Krraak, krraak!*" He said it softly under his breath, and smiled to himself.

A sudden commotion on the sunlit ground recalled his attention to the ants. Two of them had seized hold of a tiny leaf, one on each side, but they seemed unable to agree on which way it should go. They tugged in opposite directions. First one of them found firm footing in a half-buried pebble and dragged the other one, its feet scrabbling madly in loose sand. Then the second ant got a purchase on the pebble and in turn triumphantly wrestled the leaf, and its struggling rival for a fraction of an inch in *its* chosen direction. Both ants kept skidding.

Dicky bent close to watch them, a well of pure, delighted amusement bubbling up inside him. Suddenly it all seemed irresistibly funny—that grim Lilliputian determination see-sawing across a pebble just when he'd been thinking of the frog and how he'd laughed at the funny frog—

Dicky felt the spasm starting in his stomach, and ascending sneeze-like into his throat, making his nose twitch and his eyes half-close. He felt the laughter coming and couldn't stop it, and suddenly he was laughing uncontrollably, loudly, gleefully . . .

"*Dicky!*"

He heard his mother's shocked voice and scrambled to his feet, the laughter dying into indrawn sobs. The shining afternoon whirled about him into cataclysm.

"What are you doing down there?" she demanded. She stood on the edge of the lawn above

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him, her voice quivering with anger. "Dicky, answer me!"

"Looking at ants," he gulped. "I was just—" He crumbled under her reproachful eyes. "I couldn't help it, Mommie," he pleaded. "I couldn't—"

"Come here," she said in the same strained tone. "What if the neighbors heard you! Do you want them to think crazy people live here? Do you?" She broke off with an effort, and took a deep breath. "Come straight in the house now. And just you wait until your father comes home!"

The next day Dicky's father didn't go to work at the yeast plant. Instead, all three of them went for a ride. They went in a coptercab, which meant downtown, instead of in the car which would have meant a picnic in the country.

The night before there had been a consultation which Dicky had overheard only in snatches:

"Laughing at *ants!* I caught him at it."

"... At people next, I suppose!"

"But what can we have done wrong?"

Since then, happily, Dicky's fall from grace hadn't been mentioned, and in the excitement of a 'copter trip he forgot it altogether.

The automatic pilot set them down on the roof of a building that loomed large even in a neighborhood of huge buildings. Below were long halls with slick tiles and rubber runners. There were also many doors, and a great many people, dressed entirely in white, and all hurrying.

Without knowing quite how it happened, Dicky became separated from his parents in a big room with two men and a lady in white, and a lot of gleaming and mysterious apparatus. He'd been told not to be scared, and he wasn't—quite.

"Sit right here, Dicky. Just hold still, now..."

They tapped his knees with little mallets, tickled the soles of his bare feet, and shone dazzling lights into his eyes.

"Say 'black bugs' blood,' Dicky."

"Black bugs' blood," stammered Dicky, and looked around anxiously to see what, if anything, the strange incantation might have summoned up.

"That's a good boy," said the lady in white soothingly.

"Somatically okay," said the biggest man in white at last. He nodded to the other two, and they went out.

The big man sat down opposite Dicky and regarded him gravely, but not sternly. He reminded Dicky of his own father in one of his good moods.

"Now, that didn't hurt, did it?" inquired the big man.

"N-no," said Dicky.

"We had to give you some tests to make sure you were all right. You *are* all right. But your parents seem to be a little upset about you. Hmm. Why's that?" The question was gently authoritative.

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"I—I—" Dicky stumbled painfully over the truth. "I guess I *laughed.*"

The man nodded soberly, and Dicky was aware, with a sudden rush of confidence, that he wasn't surprised or shocked. It was plain that he wouldn't be, even if Dicky were to laugh right in his face. Not that Dicky felt like doing that.

"Why did you laugh? Tell me, Dicky."

"At some ants." Dicky's face felt hot, but the big man's manner was unchanged.

"Do you feel like telling me about the ants?" the big man asked. And Dicky realized that he did.

DICKY'S MOTHER demanded shakily, "But, Doctor, *what* did we do wrong?"

"We've tried to bring the boy up with every scientific advantage," his father muttered uncertainly.

The man in white sighed imperceptibly. Here were two normally intelligent and well-intentioned people. But obviously the explanations he had just given them in terms of reality had not conveyed a great deal to them. Public education, even in this day and age, left much to be desired.

He said patiently, "So far as I can tell you haven't done anything *seriously* wrong. You've provided the child with approved play materials, and you've proceeded quite properly in supplying him with safely limited opportunities for aggression against authority. Perhaps you've left him alone a little too much. What has happened is that in the absence of adult guidance an unhealthy fantasy element has crept into his play.

"When you come back tomorrow, we'll go over the home environment in detail and I may suggest a few changes. Then, with the prescription I've given you, and with Dicky coming to see me once a week, I think we'll have him entirely straightened out by the time school starts."

"Oh, I hope so!" exclaimed the mother prayerfully.

The psychologist cast an approving glance at her, and said reassuringly, "You shouldn't be unduly alarmed. It's important to remember that at Dicky's age an occasional emotional explosion—laughter, tears, rage, or the like—isn't necessarily a sign of dangerous emotional instability. After all," he smiled faintly, "a hundred years ago your Dicky's behavior would have been considered quite normal."

"Normal?" said the father with corrugated brow.

"Ideas of normality differ in different eras. Our ancestors considered laughter — even violent laughter in public—quite permissible . . . though they would have frowned on various other types of emotional exhibition. At sundry times and places there have been societies which condoned or even encouraged orgies of grief and

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guilt—megalomaniac outbursts, religious ecstasies, public sexual excesses.

"Our own forebears continued to laugh right into the twentieth century, at a time when psychiatry had already taken its first great steps forward—steps hampered, naturally, by the cultural bias . . . The popular psychology of the period even worked out a theory of the alleged value of 'emotional outlets,' disregarding, of course, the fact that energy going into such outlets was wasted. The steam that blows the whistle doesn't turn the wheels."

The parents nodded with an understanding that pleased the psychologist. Maybe there was still hope for public education.

"No doubt," he went on, "some of those immature societies I referred to—when population was sparse and resources under-developed—could *afford* their eccentricities. But modern civilization requires that all the individual's inborn aggressive energy be channeled into effective action, directed by the reality principle.

"Before we could accomplish that, we had to get rid of our forefathers' sterile idea of 'happiness,' ideas which the early psychiatrists actually regarded as a therapeutic goal. They tried to alleviate human misery without realizing that it was only one face of the coin, and that to succeed they must also study the causes and cure of happiness!

"So—" The psychologist caught himself with a glance at his watch, which had begun to buzz quietly but insistently to remind him of an appointment. "Don't worry. You see, a century ago Dicky would have gone without treatment. Upon reaching the age of puberty, he might have fallen in love, or developed other psychosomatic ills—"

The parents exchanged horrified glances.

"But nowadays we know just what to do. You haven't a thing to worry about."

He ushered them to the door beyond which Dicky waited with the nurse.

FALL WAS coming, a first chill in the air. Dicky stood at the edge of the green lawn, looking down the bare slope toward the fence and the brook beyond.

The backyard slope was no longer forbidden to him—hadn't been since the day the lawn-tender had clicked and buzzed its way along it, mowing the weeds. But he no longer felt any particular urge to explore.

Once, a long time ago in the summer, there had been something very special about the brook and the footbridge over it. But now he couldn't remember what had seemed so important. He remembered, of course, that he had walked along the brook, and had seen a frog. But he'd been much younger then.

Now summer was over, and in

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a few days Dicky would be starting to school.

He scuffed his new shoes down the weedless slope aimlessly—as far as the fence and back again. Suddenly he stopped, noticing that the ants were still there. They seemed fewer than they had been, and not so active as they straggled in thinning lines across a patch of ground completely denuded of forage.

The ants reminded him of the big man in white, who was so good at explaining things so that Dicky could understand. One thing he'd explained on request was why ants couldn't see you, even when you stood right over them.

They couldn't see you because you were too big. That seemed a strange idea, but the big man, in his patient way, had made it all sound perfectly reasonable. If ants *could* see you, they'd be scared, but only because you were so much bigger that they couldn't do anything to help themselves. So it was better for them not even to know you were there.

Dimly, as an echo, he remembered too how he'd watched the ants on a sunny afternoon, and wished he could be as small as they were. That was a silly thought, fit only for little kids that laughed and cried and wet their pants.

But it *would* be fun to be a very big giant, so big that all the people and cars in all the streets would look like little ants running around. So big they couldn't even see you, because if they could it wouldn't do them any good.

"Black bugs' blood!" said Dicky abruptly to himself.

The hard sharp heel of his new shoe ground into the anthill, obliterating the entrance, burying the frantic workers under tumbled dust. He stamped the ant hill flat with careful thoroughness.

Then he turned without another glance, not laughing or crying any more, and walked sedately up the slope to the house.

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snowstorm on mars

by . . . Jacques Jean Ferrat

So bright and fateful was Lynne Marcein's destiny that it set her apart from all other women. She was soon to have a baby—on Mars!

LYNNE FENLAY MARCEIN was the most conspicuous landmark at Nampura Depot—or, for that matter, on all of Mars. Although the Red Planet was sparsely populated, with only a little over a million men and women to cultivate its vast, waterless land-area, she could go nowhere outside of the Depot itself without finding a crowd of the curious, the awestruck, and the morbidly pessimistic about her.

She had long since given up her weekly visits to New Samarkand, the Martian metropolis and capital city. She could not enter a store, a theater, or an office without finding herself a focus of a mass interest that brought all normal traffic to a standstill. Women eyed her with sympathy and disbelief; men with downright incredulity. For Lynne was the only visibly pregnant woman on the entire planet.

"Not only visible, but apparently downright shocking," she told her husband, Rolf Marcein, over the Earth-Mars radarphone during their weekly conversation.

We might have known it would be dangerous to publish a science fantasy novel as well-liked as Jacques Jean Ferrat's NIGHTMARE TOWER, *followed by a sequel in much the same exciting vein. Unhappily for us the popularity of* THE WHITE RAIN CAME *spread in widening circles all the way to Mars and brought dire threats of telepathic reprisal for our delay in enlivening our pages once again with Lynne and Rolf Marcein in Martian splendor arrayed. Here then is a second sequel, made mandatory by our desire to keep all such threats at bay.*

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"Hold on tight, *vinral,*" Rolf told her, using the Martian term of supreme endearment. She longed to see his face, but so far there was no vidar communication between Mars and the mother planet. With obvious concern, he asked, "How soon?"

"Dr. Smetana says another two weeks, at least," she replied. "Don't worry, darling. If that little snip Rana Willis could have her baby here on Mars, I can be lucky too."

Rolf said, "I could kill these *ferkab* VIP's in Paulo City for their *czarnworm* sluggishness. We've had their E-source taped for a solid Martian month. It's right smack under the Eastern Siberian topsoil. I've laid down a reserve power-program, but they won't let me go until they've adapted it officially. Right now the date seems as far away as ever."

"I know," said Lynne soothingly. "You stick there until the job is done. I'm doing wonderfully well, according to Dr. Smetana. It's just that I'm getting a little tired of being a freak."

"And I'm getting fed up with being an engineering genius fifty million miles away while a lot of politicians check endless brain-team coordinates to make sure E-power on Earth won't upset their wretched little *ferkab* arrangements. Also, *vinral,* I miss you *farbly.*"

"Doubled in diamonds," said Lynne warmly. Before she could add further words of affection her transmission time expired and she was cut off from her husband for another Earth-week.

The fact that Lynne Marcein was pregnant was no small thing on the Red Planet. From the very first, when pioneering space ranging humanity sought to colonize Mars, the combination of rarefied atmosphere and light gravity had rendered child-bearing impossible. Since the rigors of settling a planet alien to humanity demanded the highest-level young minds and bodies, the genetic solution had originally been through induced identical twins and a better solution had not been found.

From birth one twin was conditioned and trained for life on the Red Planet, while the other was trained for life on Earth. Thus, Earth was not stripped of its most gifted and adventurous young men and women, and Mars was equally favored. Both Rolf and Lynne were the products of such training.

But Lynne was especially remarkable. She had not only been one of a pair of identical twins of opposite sexes—she had been trained for life on Earth, while her brother, Revere, had been the Mars-bred one. And yet, here she was, a Martian in the fullest sense.

"Once a freak, always a freak," she told herself wryly, as she left the Earth-Mars communications chamber and walked slowly across the courtyard of Wampura Depot Center. Her objective was the residence wing where both she, and

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Rolf—and the Willises—had their apartments.

Rough lichen-shrubs, a triumph of creative botany, bordered a smooth pathway that had a short while previously been as bare of foliage as the aluminum, cold-resistant coverall that housed both Lynne and the unborn life within her. She halted for a moment to look upward at the incredible blaze of the night heavens in the black-velvet sky, noting the brilliant passage of Deimos, one of Mars' two small moons, as it slowly blacked out of the three-starred belt of Orion.

Since she had become partially inured to the rarefied atmosphere that had made breathing difficult on her first landing, and since she hadn't far to go, she did not bother to use her oxyrespirator. The cold air stung her nostrils like fine sand and caused her to inhale deeply.

She was grateful for the air's lack of density, since its very sparseness enabled the heavens to blaze without atmospheric hindrance. She would never, being Earth-conditioned, cease wondering at the incredible splendor of the Martian skies.

And yet it seemed to her that the spectacle was infinitesimally less brilliant than it had been during her early months on the Red Planet. She could remember vividly how, abetted by her husband-to-be, she had helped save the telepaths, on whom all Mars depended for lateral planetwide communications. By themselves they would have succumbed to the maddening onslaught of the bodiless, electricity-devouring aborigines who had so nearly driven her twin insane with their insidious mind-destroying suggestions.

She had been virtually shanghaied to Mars by Rolf Marcein and, later, had helped him to discover and harness the E-power sources—those mysterious mineral brains that seemed to exist either on or within every stable planet and atmosphere-bearing satellite. It was E-power that had brought atmospheric moisture to Mars, where virtually no atmosphere existed, and had thereby speeded up the process of making the planet increasingly fertile and habitable.

Yet it was E-power that was holding her husband on faraway Earth, when she longed more than ever before to have him by her side. Not, she thought, that Rolf or any man could help her with the ordeal of giving birth to the second baby born on Mars. And it was the result of E-power that would someday blanket the spectacle of the night skies by giving the Red Planet a new atmosphere.

II

LYNNE MARCEIN rapped on the green plastic door of the three-room suite where Tony and Rana Willis, and their infant daughter made their home, and entered in response to a cheery, "Come in!"

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The first baby ever to be born on Mars was in the process of having a bath. Its parents—plump, amiable Tony Willis and tiny, vivacious Rana Spinelli—were cooing over the small portable tub like any two of the hundreds of millions of doting new parents on Earth. The bedroom, where the bath had been set up, smelled of talcum and soap and, of course—baby.

Rana looked up quickly at Lynne and said, "Well! How goes it with you, little mother?"

"*Little* mother!" exclaimed Tony, who was standing by with the towel. "Aren't you being medically inexact?"

"Don't be conceited," Lynne snapped at him. "You had little enough to do with her" she nodded toward the infant, who was cooing contentedly in her tiny plastic tub.

"Well, I did what I could," he replied with false male modesty. "Watch out, *vinral*—or you'll get soap in its eye."

"I'll thank you not to refer to our daughter as 'it,'" said Rana loftily, lifting the baby out and allowing her husband to wrap the towel around her glowing, plump little pink limbs.

Operation bath-completed, and the infant safely deposited in its crib with a bottle, the Willises joined Lynne in a cola-fizz and cigarettes. "When is Rolf coming back?" Tony asked.

"He doesn't know," said Lynne. "At least, he didn't say. As usual, the transmission time ran out before he could really discuss his plans."

"Those *ferkab* stuffed-shirts at the Earth-end!" Rana exclaimed, inhaling and blowing twin plumes of blue smoke through her nostrils. "How are you—holding out? You look simply *zwirchy*. *Farbish zwirchy.*"

"I feel like a three-headed monster," said Lynne. "Everybody stares at me. I envy you, Rana—getting through it on outpost assignment beyond New Walla Walla."

"And I envy you," said Rana, her eyes sparkling. "Here I have the first baby on Mars, and you get virtually all the attention. It got pretty lonely out there during the final weeks."

"I can imagine," said Lynne, with open admiration. What the tiny Italo-Indian girl had done seemed to her akin to the greatest epics of human heroism. Once Mars had ceased to be a raw frontier the induced-twin method had been dropped in favor of natural reproduction on the Red Planet. But since Martian environmental conditions prevented normal births, it was necessary—once a woman was known to be carrying a child—to ship her to Earth for pregnancy care and the actual birth of her baby.

It was an expensive process, not only in the strain it put on domestic relations, but because it used up cargo space sadly needed for supplies. Already Mars had built up

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a thriving export trade in lichen-wassers, lean Martian boarmeat, archeological products and rare minerals.

A brilliant telepath—which her husband was not in spite of his not inconsiderable virtues as an executive and organizer—Rana had been assigned to the lonely Thule station beyond New Walla Walla in the far Southern Polar district. Her task was to install and supervise a new trans-polar tele-communications unit that had cut and greatly simplified complex relays around the Red Planet's top. Not even Tony had known his wife was pregnant.

"I decided, since I was a Martian, that my baby was going to be Martian too," was what the tiny slip of a woman had told an almost raging Rolf and Tony. Incredible had seemed her courage when her condition had been finally discovered—much too late for the usual transport to Earth.

When the male protests continued, Rana said quietly, "No woman on Mars has ever carried a child more than four months. I'm already in my seventh. Now will you stop worrying?"

At this stage Lynne had intervened, firm in her conviction that Rana had accomplished a miracle. "How?" she asked.

Rana's reply had been as original as it had been unexpected. "A trained telepath must be able to attain total concentration at will. To achieve such concentration we need complete mental control. That in itself is inseparably tied up with complete control of our bodies. And a baby is closer than breathing to its own mother."

"But I still don't see how—"

"Crebut!" had been Rana's reply. "You remind me of the Indian chief who said to the mermaid in the old Earth-joke: *'I did exercises.'"* Then, growing serious, she had explained the process—a well conceived combination of TP and yoga, practiced at regular intervals, that had thus far assured the child's safety.

Later, noting the detached look in Lynne's eye, Rolf had protested, "If you think for a moment, *vinral,* that you're going to put me through what poor Tony's enduring, you're out of your mind."

"We'll have plenty of time to talk about that," Lynne had affirmed, *"after* Rana's baby is born."

"If Rana's baby is born," had been Rolf's tormented comment.

But the baby had been born, and was thriving. Now Lynne was carrying the second Mars-child, with only two weeks to go unless Dr. Smetana was grievously mistaken. She had found the "exercises" which enabled her to protect the child curiously restful—once she had mastered the task of attaining close rapport between her body's precious new burden and the universe around her.

Despite the awkwardness of advanced pregnancy, she felt strangely at peace with herself and the in-

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finite. Even Rolf's enforced absence didn't matter too much—though she longed to have him with her. She moved through her daily work at the Depot—the task of seeking new telepathic relays which would detect the existence of other, alien intellects in the cosmos—almost as if it were being done by a complete stranger.

She finished her second cola-fizz, glanced at her wristwatch and rose, a trifle clumsily, even though the light gravity of Mars made the weight within her comparatively light. "Well, chilluns," she said, "it's time for this little mother-to-be to go home and commune with nature."

Tony was about to ask her a question, when a choking wail from the bedroom sent him flying. "Honestly — *men*!" exclaimed Rana. "They're such idiots about babies!"

III

LATE THE following morning, in accordance with her pre-maternity schedule, Lynne paid her daily visit to Dr. Smetana's office. It adjoined the gray-walled infirmary in the southeast corner of the low, sprawling complex of semi-cylindrical buildings that was Nampura Depot—literally the brain-center of Mars. The doctor was a stocky, square-jawed man with unexpectedly light-blue eyes and a deceptive appearance of ill-health, thanks to the refusal of his skin to acquire the usual Martian sunburn. He put her through the usual run of tests and shook his head.

"I'll be *zwirched*," he said, "if I can figure out how you manage it, Lynne. According to everything we've learned about women on this ghastly, wonderful planet you should have lost your child four months ago. Yet everything still looks one hundred percent."

"If I'm such a freak, what about Rana Willis?" said Lynne, who was beginning to tire of the "miracle" aspects of her pregnancy.

"We expect miracles to happen once in a long while," Dr. Smetana told her, "but not two in a row."

"Or maybe it's not such a miracle after all," Lynne suggested. "I'm merely following Rana's technique —with a wrinkle or two of my own thrown in. If it works for two of us—"

"Remember, you're both Class-C telepaths," said the physician. "I'd hate to recommend this yoga-and-TP technique to anyone less gifted. And, right now, there are only fifty-three Class-C telepaths, female gender, on Mars. So . . ." He lifted one thick, dark eyebrow.

Leaving the doctor, on her way to the dining hall for lunch, Lynne ran into an old acquaintance—dark-skinned Joanna Wheatley, who had shared a space-ship cabin with her on her trip out from Earth. The young animal-husbandry expert had, quite by accident, put Lynne on the track of the E-power source that was already doing so much to

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increase the density of the Martian atmosphere, and make successful cultivation possible on the bleak desert wastes.

Joanna, a buoyantly healthy, good-natured girl who usually wore her exuberant emotions close to the ebony surface of her skin, seemed to Lynne strangely subdued. Looking at her in disbelief, Lynne said, "*Crehut,* Joanna, you can't be ill. Not you."

"I'm not," was the reply. "At least, I don't think I am. But my chief at Woomera Station thought your Dr. Smetana had better look me over." Then, eying Lynne's figure, "You look wonderful. Lynne, I'd give anything to trade places with you. Every woman on Mars would."

That, Lynne decided, was probably untrue. She interrupted with, "Woomera Station? I thought you were running the beef garden at Patagonia since old E gave us enough moisture for pampas."

"I am," said the girl with a flash of pride. "But Patagonia is still under Woomera control. Lynne, what you did to harness E-power was the most marvelous thing. And now, this!"

"*This* is one prolonged headache," said Lynne, looking down at herself ruefully. "One of these days, when it's over, I'm coming down to pay you and your prize shorthorns a visit."

"That would be wonderful," Joanna said, her eyes glowing. Then her gaze fell away, her manner became diffident. "But not too soon," she said in an abnormally small voice. "Things are a bit messed up right now. I'd say they were downright *swackish.*" Another pause, then, "I'll let you know when we have everything *purt.* I do want you down there."

"I'll be there—whenever you're ready," said Lynne. "Don't let old Smetana intimidate you, Joanna. He has a heart of lichen-jelly."

She gave Joanna's smooth-fleshed, muscular forearm a friendly squeeze. Then she went on out and crossed the main patio to the dining hall, where she joined her twin brother, Revere and his wife, Lao Mei, at one of the smaller tables. As always, when confronted with Revere, Lynne wondered why she hadn't been born a man. To her, the Fenlay face looked far better in masculine gender. Fortunately, she thought, her husband did not agree.

Lao Mei, small, exquisitely feminine and endowed not only with quiet charm but with that combination of fine human ingredients customarily lumped under the general heading of "character," was recently back from Earth, where she had born Revere induced twins. She said, "How is it, Lynne. Is everything still *purt?*"

Lynne nodded and turned her attention to her soup. "Couldn't be *purter,*" she replied, thinking that Lao Mei, with her hard core of integrity had been a wonderful mate for Revere, who was brilliant,

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telepathically gifted, but given to occasional lapses of weakness.

You can say that again. Revere's thought came through to her clearly across the table. *Everything really* zwirchy?

Everything's fine. It was not really good manners at Nampura Depot for two Class-C telepaths, capable of receiving, selecting and projecting thoughts to indulge in silent dialogue in the presence of a mere Class-A like Lao Mei. But since it was all in the family . . .

Lynne went on silently to Revere, who, with non-TP Tony Willis virtually ran Martian communications while Rolf was away on Earth, *I've got to take an exercise spell after lunch or I'd tend to it myself. But I wish you'd check Doc Smetana on Joanna Wheatley of Patagonia Station this pip emma and give me the gen on her.*

Why, something up? Revere inquired with a thought-probe. Lynne told him of her meeting in the doctor's office, and the girl's strange behavior. Then, aloud, she said, "If something *is* wrong down there, it might be a good idea to find it out now. You know how touchy Husbandry has been about our mucking into their *ferkab* affairs—ever since we had them shut off their atomic transmuter while we were getting Old E in a harness. It's probably nothing. But it didn't *feel* like nothing. Joanna was keeping her thoughts rigidly masked while I talked to her."

"If you two *marlets* do any more silent talking while I'm at this table," said Lao Mei sternly, "I'm going to dump your food right over your heads. It's like being stranded in the middle of a deaf-mute convention and not knowing sign language."

"Sorry," said Lynne.

Revere took his wife's hand and squeezed it. Then, telepathically, to Lynne he said: *Will do, female. Go do your exercises and let Brother Revere ride again.*

Lao Mei, looking at them closely, made a move toward a particularly drippy canalberry salad with leeks, and thereafter the table talk was just that. When Lynne left them to go to her room, her sister-in-law said with a sigh, "I'm going to turn my old brain in for a new model—a TP Class-D one."

"If you do," said Revere Fenlay, "you'll be the only one in all the worlds. So who will you have to talk to?"

"It's not *whom* I'll have to talk to," said Lao Mei demurely. "It's the *whoms* I'll be able to shut out."

IV

LYNNE LAY on her plastomat for the next two hours, one hour on her stomach, the other on her back. Under the conditions of light Martian gravity, these positions had been discovered to be better for yoga breathing and trance than the cross-legged, sitting positions of yoga on Earth. More important,

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they maintained a more normal flow of circulation through the brain, a flow essential to full TP keying and control.

At first, as she lay prone on the mat, it seemed to her that every stray thought in the Depot came tripping, unwanted, into her head —every stray thought in Mars. She could, had she wished, have identified the senders, but to do so would have destroyed her purpose. A vital factor in Rana's success with the first Mars-born baby, had been the isolation of her post, and her ability to shut out extraneous thoughts, and concentrate entirely upon the union of her own existence and the new life blossoming in her womb.

Lynne breathed deeply and closed her eyes. She relaxed the muscles at the corners of her eyes and little by little awareness of outside thoughts faded. At the end of the first hour, after rolling over on her back, she was able to lose all outside interference in a matter of mere minutes. Then her real concentration began.

She grew conscious of the unborn child she was carrying, even to sensing the faint and fitful radiations of its thoughts. From time to time she felt the stir of its body, the kick of its feet. She conveyed a message of union, of *oneness,* of warmth and security to the embryo brain within her. Then, after a while, she slept dreamlessly.

She awoke at the exact end of the second hour, feeling serene and refreshed. A thought reached her mind, probing, a thought unmistakably that of her twin, Revere. He was telling her, if she was awake, to go immediately to the doctor's office. Something about Joanna Wheatley and a cattle plague and the DT's . . .

Revere and the doctor were waiting for Lynne in the physician's inner laboratory. It was the room of a medical jack-of-all-trades, for Mars, being thinly populated and in need of a variety of medical services, was unable to afford the specialists of Earth. Dr. Smetana was not only a fine general practitioner. He was also the only competent psychiatrist in this entire sector of the Red Planet. It was therefore not surprising that he had been assigned to Nampura Depot, since the telepathic headquarters of Mars was a place where, presumably a head-shrinker might be needed.

However, as Dr. Smetana was fond of saying, "In that department, I'm merely an observer, since TP's are mentally just about the healthiest folk there are. Telepathy and repression don't exactly walk hand in hand."

Revere spoke to Lynn aloud for the benefit of the doctor, who was barely a Class-A telepath. "I've been doing some checking on conditions at Patagonia Station," he said. "Those *marlets* have been having a bucketful of *swackish* troubles lately. It seems the cattle have been showing every symptom

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of going off their collective rails—stampedes, off-season breeding fits, berserk tempers, even dancing."

"That I'll have to see," said Lynne, lighting a cigarette.

"You will—in a moment," said Dr. Smetana. "I've got Joanna Wheatley's tapes right here." He turned on a switch.

At once a wall screen flashed on, revealing a set of file numbers. Thanks to Rolf Marcein's development of the formerly dangerous necro-recorder, which reproduced on a screen the thoughts of a person under certain hypnotic drugs, psychiatry on Mars had taken a long leap ahead of parallel progress on the mother planet. There, because its use hastened death or insanity through the strain it put on the patient's mind and body, the recorder was still used only in cases of extreme urgency. On Mars, thanks to Rolf's improvements its use had become mere examination routine.

The screen flashed its polychromatic "adjustment" patterns, some of which were highly revealing of Joanna's normal young woman desires. Then, in response to channeled suggestion, got to the matter under examination. The miraculous green grasses of the newly-created Patagonia Station veldt appeared in brilliant color with the dark blue sky of Mars over them. Small herds of plump, carefully selected beef cattle grazed peacefully on the grass which the wonder of E-power had made possible. There was even a glimpse of Joanna, riding herd on a tractoscooter, and smoking a cigarette.

Then the vehicle was halted close to a herd which the dark-skinned girl was inspecting. A plump steer turned to watch her. It seemed to be regarding her with speculation. There was a close-up of the creature's face, its eyes revealing a startling intelligence.

All at once, the steer went into a dance. It was a rhythmic swaying, at first, but it quickly became a series of small steps in harmony with some unheard rhythm or meter. The other steers looked, nodded or shook their heads and finally joined in, following the leader. They performed almost like a vidar chorus-line back on Earth, kicking in unison and swaying as if to music.

Then they broke up into groups and entered into a series of unbelievable revels that could only be described as immoral, even for animals. There was a flash of Joanna, taking off on her tractoscooter, followed by a picture of her back on the scene, with the neighboring Woomera Depot superintendent, while the creatures placidly grazed.

"What do you make of it?" Dr. Smetana asked the instant the film ended. He was frowning as he switched off the recorder. "Is she crazy?"

Lynne knew what Revere was thinking, and for a moment, there was shared horror between them.

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They *knew* what had happened to the prize cattle of the Red Planet's only ranch. Lynne said aloud, for the doctor's benefit, "Joanna Wheatley isn't crazy, Doctor."

"But what about those cattle?" the physician asked.

"Revere will tell you," Lynne replied. "I've got to put an emergency call through to my husband. He's needed here—at once."

Absently, she cursed the fact of her advanced pregnancy, and the demands it made on her. If she hadn't been so nearly incapacitated, she would have been able to handle the matter herself. How and where, she wondered, had the grotesque, bodiless aborigines of Mars—life forms that fed on electricity—managed to get enough of it to obtain strength for possession even of bovine brains? Rolf would have to come back at once, to deal with this new outbreak of a problem long considered under control.

Lynne put through her call, and obtained Mars Central on New Samarkand. Fortunately, she was able to cut through red tape and obtain the chief supervisor without delay.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Marcein," he said, in reply to her request for an immediate Earth-call to her husband. "Solar disturbances have temporarily blocked interplanetary communications."

Lynne hung up, feeling almost physically ill. All the terrors of Nightmare Tower, where she had battled the vicious aborigines alone in the darkness, returned to plague her. Then she rallied and remembered that a deadly threat that had been conquered before could be conquered again. She was going to have to go it alone.

Inside her, the baby kicked feebly.

V

MARTIN JUAREZ, Director of Woomera Station and Patagonia Station, and the most influential single individual in the entire Martian Agricultural Experiment Program, was a wiry, swarthy man whose face and bare forearms had been burned almost black by the fierce Martian sun. Looking at Lynne, across his office desk, he said, "Mrs. Marcein, I'm almost beginning to wish Joanna was as crazy as a *czanworm*."

"So am I," said Lynne quietly. She turned and looked directly at the dark-skinned young animal husbandry expert she had seen only the day before in Dr. Smetana's office at Nampura Depot. "Nothing personal, Joanna," she said.

"*Crebut!*" exploded the girl. "I wish *I* was crazy instead of those steers. Mars can always ship out a replacement for me. But they can't breed cattle on Earth capable of surviving on this planet."

Lynne thought Joanna had put the problem very eloquently. Somehow, the zombies, as she termed the electrophagic aborigines that had supposedly been routed forever

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shortly after her arrival, had discovered a new source of dietary strength. This time, with appalling ingenuity, they had evidently decided not to seek possession of human bodies—or, to be more exact, human minds laid bare to them by telepathic exposure.

Instead, they had elected to take over the minds of the Patagonia Station steers. Lynne would have given several years of her life to know why and how the selection had been made. According to Martin Juarez and Joanna, there had been no abnormal behavior on the part of other species of food-on-the-hoof bred and raised at the two stations. Sheep, fowl and pigs had been left entirely alone, either through choice, or because they were invulnerable to zombie possession.

The zombies, whose visible record had been left for human study on hundreds of magnificent murals in the ruins that had survived for untold ages, owing to the airless and moistureless Martian climate, had been one of the two dominant species on the Red Planet.

Somehow — probably through their ability to survive in electronic rather than physical form—they had survived the long desolation of their home world, where all animate life with the exception of the mindless czanworms and the imbecilic sand-lurtonks had succumbed.

They were weird and utterly repulsive creatures — with complex multiple bodies, undefined appendages and much-too-well-defined reproductive organs. Their concept of proper mating behavior was utterly beyond the pale from a human point of view. They were revolting—and Lynne well knew that much of the horror they inspired in human minds was caused by the fact that they managed to make their ghastly idea of fun and games even momentarily alluring.

Lynne shuddered, remembering her previous combats with them, before their positively-charged entities had succumbed to the telepathically directed bursts of negative anion-gun barrages. Then she said, "The first thing I'd like to do is examine every record you have of abnormal behavior among the cattle."

"Joanna will give you the tapes, Mrs. Marcein," said Martin Juarez. He paused, then added, "I'm sorry to be causing you such trouble at this time."

"Forget it," said Lynne, lighting a cigarette. "I'll manage. Even if the worst should happen, I can always try again. You may not have the chance if we don't lick this thing right now."

She knew that Juarez knew he should have reported the trouble sooner—at least to Mars Agriculture Chief Radchev. But Mars was still a pioneer planet, and a responsible project boss like Juarez was very much on his own. Naturally, he had not wished to report a failure until he could be sure

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it was real and that there was no possibility of mastering it with the means at his command. Lynne liked him, sensed his very real abilities, and had no wish to chide him.

While studying the record-tapes in Joanna's neat office, with its bright pots of flowering lichen-heather, Lynne considered just how serious the problem was. Until E-power had been harnessed to give impetus to the restoration of Martian atmosphere, the planet's human population had had to subsist largely on synthetic foods, plus the occasional lean, leather-tough meat from wild pigs which had somehow survived exportation from Earth and reverted to savagery.

The small bits of grass and grain and vegetables that were painfully nurtured in the bone-dry Red Planet soil were far too precious and costly to be used for animal fodder. Not until the atomic transmuter had been installed at Woomera Station could any cattle be grazed at all. And here, the cost was way out of line with even experimental results. Until E-power, through controlled moisture production, enabled an ever-growing patch of Martian soil to become fertile, the effort to grow cattle on Mars was doomed.

"Here's the first case on record," said Joanna, halting the tape unwinding its record of pictures, written matter and her own clear, precise accents on a vidarscreen. "It happened last May twenty-third, Earth-calendar. Old Bill, one of our prize musk-Brahmas, went on a rampage and tried to catwalk the drinking pool border and fell in. It was pretty unusual, but not alarming. No harm was done."

"Stay with it, Joanna," said Lynne.

She was thinking of what failure of the husbandry program could mean at this stage. Since the Red Planet had no water surface—above all no salt water—the plankton which had become the staple diet of an overpopulated Earth was simply not available. Mars needed beef, and lamb, and good rich pork. No heat or energy tablets could make up for the real things—especially on a sub-Arctic pioneer planet.

Other incidents of cattle aberration showed on the record with increasing frequency and severity. It was a senseless duel that had left two prime musk-oxen dripping their own insides. It was an utterly out-of-season misbreeding in which the bull seemed to have been helped to achieve his purpose in a sort of team operation—a senseless miniature stampede that had run off tons of good meat from the bones of its owners.

"You know about the dance I saw yesterday," said Joanna, her bright eyes falling away. "When I reported it, Martin went back with me to witness it. The cattle were all as mild as turtles. He ordered *me* to report to Dr. Smetana."

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"Crehut, I was there yesterday—remember?" Lynne said.

She glanced at the biplanetary chronometer on her wrist—a trim and amazing simplification of complexities which Rolf had given her on her last birthday. She wondered if her brother or Tony Willis, back at Nampura Depot, had got through to Rolf yet.

Then she became aware of the time, and realized that she had missed her period of yoga-TP concentration on the precious burden she was carrying inside her. As if in protest, the baby kicked vigorously, twice. Lynne closed her eyes and sent a message to the unborn tot—*Easy, infant, mummy's right here.* There was no time for rest now. She had to try to make some sense out of Joanna's records.

She began to make sense out of the problem after a while. But it was an understanding that deepened, rather than relieved her growing concern and mounting fear. Fear of the zombies had never fully left her since her first ghastly encounter with them in Nightmare Tower, when it had seemed to her that her mind must forever stand alone against the ghastly phantoms of an alien world.

Until the previous February Patagonia Station had been little more than a blueprint addition to the rapidly spreading green acres of Woomera Station. In the fenced-in, relatively small grazing areas of the parent station there had been plenty of negative electricity protection against zombie inroads. And similar fences had been erected around every important official installation on Mars.

But the zombie threat was ancient history, and the broad new pastures of Patagonia Station had been planned to enable the specially bred Red Planet cattle to roam free—as they had done in the early days of the American Southwest, the Argentina pampas and the tse fly-freed plateau of Central Africa. The results of this mistake could be ticked off almost by the calendar.

The zombies had moved in and were feeding on the vast electrical discharges of the mysterious E-entity that provided the power—through human-inspired irritation—to create the storms and moisture that made the expanded station possible. Taking possession of the empty bovine minds, they were beginning to play their monstrous games as their new-fed strength waxed.

"Crehut! Look at those *ferkab* devils now!" Joanna had risen and was staring in horror at a vidar-screen on which was projected a fairly wide expanse of New Patagonia Station. "Come *on*!" she cried.

Lynne paused for an incredulous moment to study the screen. It showed level acres, bright with tough, waving grass, each green stretch dotted with gray, long-haired cattle. The normally stupid and independent beasts were clus-

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tering together in a strange way, forming distinct group shapes, almost as if in response to some alien military command.

Even as she watched she saw the leader—a large long-horned steer—deliberately lower his head and savagely attack an animal that had managed to get in his way. She caught a glimpse of blood dripping from its torn flanks and spreading like a sun-reddened shadow over the emerald-green grass.

"I'm *coming!*" she said grimly in response to another plea from Joanna.

VI

THEY RODE a two-place tractoscooter together, with Joanna driving the rugged, almost-springless vehicle recklessly out over the expanse of the growing station toward the scene of incipient disaster. Lynne hung onto her perch with both hands, her lips white as they rocketed over grassland that had looked level on the vidarscreen, but proved in reality to be savagely bumpy and uneven.

Joanna, dominated as she was by a desperate concern for the safety of her cattle, did not realize her recklessness until she had braked the vehicle, almost in the midst of the zombie-driven beasts. She plucked a long bullwhip from a boot at her side, and a stunner from the dashboard pocket in front of her. She marched boldly toward the herd, which had ceased all movement and was regarding her with massed, owlish eyes.

Then, suddenly, she stopped and turned to Lynne, a look of utter consternation on her face. "Lynne!" she exclaimed. "What a *ferkab marlet* I am. I completely forgot about the baby! Are you all right?"

"So far everything's *purt*," said Lynne, reassured by her own lack of distress. She was all right, she decided, and felt relief flood through her. "Get on with it, Joanna," she urged. "I needn't tell you how important it is."

Alarm rang like an old-fashioned radar *ping* in her brain, and she swung about just in time to see a long-haired musk-ox rising from the tall grass in which he had been lying concealed, and advancing on the tractoscooter they had just abandoned.

She experienced a chilling sense of triumphant malice as the shaggy beast reared and brought its forefeet viciously down on the dashboard and steering apparatus of the vehicle. Instantly the scooter was wrecked beyond immediate hope of repair.

Fear became so much a part of Lynne she could feel its copper taste at the base of her tongue.

"Joanna!" she cried, her voice strangely weak. "Look behind you."

The girl turned, her eyes narrowed in desperate rage. Raising the stunner she felled the zombie-ridden creature with a perfect shot between the eyes, and watched it

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collapse beside the vehicle it had wrecked.

"That should put you to sleep for a while, you *czanworm*," she said, furiously.

Lynne had turned again. The massed herd was advancing remorselessly now, spear-headed by an even larger creature. She recognized it as the leader she had seen in the vidar screen in Joanna's office. There was still blood on its horns, and tumultuously heaving flanks. Lynne could feel the triumphant malice pouring from the zombie in control, and an even greater horror came upon her.

"Joanne," she called desperately, wondering in an extremity of panic, what had possessed her to expose herself to so great a danger at such a time. She had no doubt at all concerning the deadliness of the danger. And it was increased immeasurably seconds later when the dark girl swung about and fired pointblank at the menacing ovebos. As the echoes of the blast died she hurled her weapon away with a Martian curse.

"Forgot to recharge it," Joanna said bitterly. Swinging about and whirling the bullwhip about her head, she advanced straight toward the herd, cracking the whip at them, the flicks sounding like a series of rifle-shots.

Some of the cattle shifted uneasily and refused to come forward. Here and there a steer even turned and broke away. But the leader, and those close behind him continued their inexorable advance.

Lynne got a flash of a too-familiar alien thought, and cried aloud, "Careful, Joanna, they're going to stampede."

The leader executed an odd, an un-oxlike little shuffle. Then he lowered his bloody horns for the charge.

Lynne Marcein, at that moment of great peril, became telepathically hyper-acute. She received, sifted, analyzed, and identified a series of terrifying mental impressions which came in such quick succession that they seemed dreamlike and unreal. There was Joanna, whatever fear she felt sublimated to outrage at the grotesque derelictions of the animals whose breeding and care was her job. Joanna was going to use her whip until the stupid, insane creatures turned and fled in blind panic.

But the creatures were neither stupid nor insane. At least, the brains and beings that controlled them were not craven. They were as determined as Joanna to destroy her, an obstacle in the path of their appalling urge for such degenerate pleasure as their bovine embodiment would permit. She caught the mass urge to destroy, and instantly thereafter the driving mental force of the leader with his gore-soaked horns.

By concentrating telepathically on the leader, Lynne automatically shut out all other minds from her consciousness. This was a weapon that would have stood all telepaths

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in good stead when the zombies threatened their sanity with mass possession. For the Martian aborigines, standing alone, lacked the strength to overpower and possess a human TP brain. Their power lay in numbers, not in the individual mind.

VII

ALL THIS Lynne learned in an eyelid's flicker, while the leader lowered his horns to charge, and the lazy snake of Joanna's long whip made a black silhouette against the Martian sky. She sensed the revelry and sense of power that came from possession of a strong animal body after uncounted ages of disembodiment. But that feeling of power was accompanied by the unsureness of not knowing exactly the stolen body's limitations or what animal instincts the possessor might have to control at a moment's notice. She sensed concern at the defection of some of the herd, evidently against the wishes of their zombie controllers.

Deliberately, Lynne lowered the level of her probe, shutting out the aboriginal brain completely. Somewhere, underneath, lay the stupid, foolish, instinct-ridden cattle brain. Never before had Lynne—or anyone else to her knowledge—sought telepathic contact with an animal mind. Yet alien brains of all levels had been contacted during the long-range experiments at Nampura Depot.

It could be done. It had to be done. She was dealing with the leader. If she could force his bovine body to revolt, to stampede wildly, other bovine bodies would follow —for such unreasoning obedience was deeply instinctive in all cattle.

Suddenly she caught it—faint, inchoate as the mind of the unborn child within her—a fear buried deep beneath the alien mentality. But she caught it, and held it, probing it relentlessly. She felt it catch explosively. She saw the great beast halt and tremble, helpless in the grip of three minds, just as Joanna cracked the whip with aggressive violence.

There was a frantic shaking of a shaggy head, a momentary quivering. Then the leader turned and began to trot in front of his followers—began to trot, to lope, to canter, finally to cut around the body of them at a full, heavy gallop.

There was a confused chorus of other cattle sounds. Then, punctuated by the lashings of the bullwhip, the entire herd was galloping away in helpless stampede toward the distant rim of the ever-widening Patagonia pasturage.

Joanna coiled her whip, and stared after the galloping herd. "Spooky *marlets*," she muttered. "I hardly cracked the whip at them, and they take off like a bunch of locos."

Lynne, who was still trembling violently, looked at the girl in amazement. "You don't sound very

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happy about they're not trampling us into the ground," she said.

"That's not the point," Joanna replied. "I just don't like having them stampede. They'll run off fifty pounds a head before they're through. It means fattening them up all over again, and a serious delay in our schedule."

There, thought Lynne, spoke the dedicated animal husbandry woman. She followed slowly while Joanna walked to the base of a vidar-tower, plucked a communicator from a plastobox, and called Woomera to send out a pickup for them. Both girls waited by the tower, smoking cigarettes, until the low-built air-sled arrived.

Less than two hours later, Mars-time, Lynne and Joanna were in conference with Martin Juarez and Nicholas Radchev, Planetary Agricultural Director, who had hopped a rocket from New Smarkand to confer on the emergency. A huge, swarthy man with tousled white hair, he shook his head slowly at the conclusion of Lynne's report.

"An unfortunate mess, Mrs. Marcein," he said. "What do you suggest we do about it?" He spoke with respect, for he had not forgotten that it was Lynne and her husband who had made Patagonia Station possible through their harnessing of the hitherto deadly and uncontrollable E-power.

"I'd like to know a bit more about it before I suggest anything," said Lynne quietly.

Joanna said: "I thought that big fellow spooked *ferkab* easily when I cracked the whip at him. Lynne, why didn't you *tell* me you were using TP on him?"

"I didn't want to bore you with long explanations just then," said Lynne, her eyes bright with amusement. Then, becoming serious once more, she asked, "Any results on the anion-gun tests?"

Juarez, who had been busying himself with a vidar screen in a corner of his office turned and replied, "The report just came in. The results, I'm sorry to say, are negative. The zombie steer used for the testing is dead."

"I was afraid of that," said Radchev, running thick, muscular fingers through his shock of white hair. "The poor beast was well electrocuted. They're a lot more sensitive than sheep in some ways. They have more delicate nervous systems."

"What about the zombie?" Lynne asked.

"Burned out, too," said Juarez. "The *marlet* couldn't shake itself out in time and took a full negative charge."

There was a moment of silence. Lynne didn't have to probe the other minds in the room to know what they were thinking. Her own mind was following the same channel. If mechanical means—via the anion-guns which had routed the disembodied zombies—failed conspicuously now, the problem remained grave. For uninhibited

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possession would destroy the all-important Patagonia Station development and, with it, all hope of future beef for Mars. Left in possession the aborigines would run the cattle ragged, foul up the breeding lines, and destroy one another in spurts of sheer malice.

Furthermore, it was conceivable that they might batten on their bovine hosts until they grew sufficiently strong to leave them and assume some form still more dangerous to humanity on Mars.

Director Radchev spoke in his deep rumble of a voice. "You say, Lynne, it's positive emanations from the E-for-Entity that has made them strong enough to take over the beeves?"

"I'm sure of it," Lynne told him. "Whenever we irritate E to create a storm, he releases plenty of positive electricity over the entire area —and that's what the zombies feed on."

"How long can Woomera and Patagonia endure without rain or snow?" Radchev asked Martin Juarez.

"Not long enough," said the station boss quickly. "One Mars-week without moisture would dry us up. Two would cripple us."

The director nodded, his full lips tightly compressed. Then he turned deliberately to Lynne and said, "Any suggestions?"

She returned his level stare while she turned over in her mind the idea that had been burgeoning there. "Just one," she said. "While I was probing the leader out there I received a number of definite impressions. Most of them were straight zombie—the usual ghastly *swackish* stuff."

After a brief, organizational pause, she added, "But there was also an impression of discomfort, almost of fear. The only comparison I can make is to the uneasiness a green rider feels mounted on a new and too-spirited horse. He knows he has control, but he isn't quite sure what the beast may try on him, and he isn't quite sure just how he's going to come down—of his own volition, or his mount's."

"Then you think—"

"I think they're still struggling for control," Lynne said. "They can't control the human mind because it's too tough, too alien, and complex. They failed to take permanent possession even of a wide open TP brain. Now they've hit the other extreme—a bovine brain that is beneath their comprehension. They can move in on it, they can blanket it—but they can't be sure it won't kick off the covers.

"Not one of those beasts wanted to stampede the way they did. But once I triggered the beast-brain in the leader, and Joanna cracked her whip, he had to obey steer-instinct and flee. And the others had to follow him, zombie control or not."

"What's this leading up to?" Radchev asked. He had pulled out a plastopipe, and was packing it with coarse Martian shag. Lynne

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caught a wry longing for good Earth-tobacco, inhibited by a stern resolve to fulfill his obligations as Agricultural Director of Mars by using only the home-grown product.

She checked her amusement out of courtesy, and said, "There's another factor that may prove vital—*farbishly* so. In their disembodied form the zombies went streaking off at the first threat of danger. That's why we haven't been able to put them out of business for keeps. But this time, they may be in trouble. I'm not at all sure they can get out of these bovine bodies they've taken over."

"So what do you propose?" Martin Juarez asked.

"We're going to try to put the zombies to sleep," said Lynne quietly. "I've already sent out a call for help to my TP pals from Nampura Depot. We're going to set up a TP brain team on Patagonia Station and use mass-hypnosis on the whole *farbish* herd."

"You're going to hypnotize the zombies?" Joanna was appalled.

Lynne shook her head and smiled. "Hardly!" she said. "We don't even know that they'll react to our suggestions. We're going to give the cattle immunity to possession."

Radchev and Juarez exchanged glances. Then the director rose and took her small hand in his. "Young lady," he said, "you seem to have done it again."

"Better save your congratulations until the job is completed," she told him. "We may not even get out of the batter's box."

Lynne and her colleagues were waiting at the trim Woomera Station landing field when the newcomers' Nampura Depot runabout landed, and her twin brother and Rana Willis got out. Rana, looking irrepressible as usual, went into a bowlegged stance and said, "Well, pardner, how's the roundup?"

Lynne sensed that the girl was glad to get briefly away from her first-born Mars child as she made the introductions. At their conclusion, Revere Fenlay said, "Well, we brought the tridi projector along."

"Okay," said Lynne. "Don't unpack it yet. We've got a bit further to go. Back in with you, *czanworms*."

She waved farewell to the others and climbed into the runabout after them, to make the short hop to Mars' still small cattle country.

They landed at the far side of Patagonia Station's fenced-in acres, and Lynne stood by while Revere and Rana unpacked the light but sturdy gear. She had asked for and secured a three-dimensional projector, knowing that the eyes of cattle would not respond to a picture on a flat screen.

Her plan was to flash a series of flickering, bright-moving objects before the animals, hoping to attract their attention willy nilly, very much as a toreador's cape attracts a ring bull. Then, when the cattle

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were all focused, she planned to use the combined TP power of three minds like a trebly stepped-up battery—to hypnotize the entire herd and build a protective mental wall around each of the stupid steer brains.

If all went well, the zombies would be locked in their new bodies, but would be unable to control them at all.

VIII

THREE HOURS after its inauguration, Lynne Marcein realized that the experiment was a failure. The cattle showed no signs of being menacing or resentful. They did not stampede or go into weird parade formations, or gore one another for sport. They were evidently spent of body from their exertions earlier in the day.

But, save for a few individuals, they simply refused to pay attention. Having glanced at the screen that was supposed to fix their interest they would lower their heads and resume grazing, or would simply turn away.

Five times, Lynne had Revere and Rana move the tridi projector, in an effort to so arrange its viewing curvature so that general attention would be compulsory. Five times the possessed beasts figuratively shrugged, humped their shaggy shoulders, and mooed, *So What?* Then they went about their bovine business.

"*Farbish* clever, these Mars-steers," said Revere with a weak attempt at humor, when Lynne finally called a halt.

"I've worn my *ferkab* brain to the bone," put in tiny Rana inelegantly, "trying to bring those stupid creatures under my spell. The *farb* of it is, I can feel those zombies snickering at me. I should like to twist them out of their silly cow-brains with my bare hands."

"I know," said Lynne with a wan smile, suddenly close to the outer limits of physical, nervous and mental endurance. "I feel like . . ." She paused, her face turning deathly pale, and then said in a wondering tone, "I feel like I'm going to have the baby right here."

They got her back to adjoining Woomera Station in a hurry, where she was soon stretched out on a dispensary plastomat, sobbing with pain, with fatigue and with the sickening sense of double failure. Not only had she failed to destroy zombie possession of the Patagonia Station cattle, but she had put aside her primary duty to handle the big problem—had neglected to take care of the precious unborn life she had fought so hard to keep for all but a tiny fraction of nine months.

She knew she was acting like a baby herself—whimpering, crying out when the pain grew severe, making an idiot of herself.

"Where's Dr. Smetana?" she said to Martin Juarez, who was standing over her bed with rolled-

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up sleeves and a deep concern in his eyes.

"Don't worry about a thing," he told her soothingly, bending to inject something into her left arm. "Just relax now—"

"I want my husband," she heard herself scream. "Where's Rolf? He should be here at this time."

Then, mercifully, she blacked out, riding a storm-tossed ocean such as Mars had not known for half a million years.

Coming out of it, an indeterminable time later, she realized she must have been delirious. She had actually dreamed Rolf was there at her side—though she knew he was still on Earth trapped in an octopus monster of Mother-Planet red tape. She had dreamed of actually having her baby . . .

Baby! Her hands flew to her abdomen. It was flat! All at once tears of utter desolation and defeat rolled down her cheek. She had lost the child—and through her own heedlessness and neglect, after working so hard, so faithfully, for so long.

"You've got nothing to cry about," said a familiar voice.

She opened her eyes, and there was Dr. Smetana, sitting by her plastomat. She murmured, "Thank God! You got here, Doctor."

"I got here," he replied quietly, "but too *swackish* late. By the time I arrived, your son was already born and howling."

"*My son!* Where is he?" Lynne cried eagerly, trying to sit up.

Dr. Smetana gently but firmly pushed her flat. "You'll be up soon enough," he told her. "When you've walked the floor a few nights with this he-banshee of yours you'll regret every minute you didn't lie down in your life. A good baby—eight pounds, thirteen ounces."

"*Crehut!*" said Lynne inelegantly, pushing back the light hair from her forehead. "But how—I mean, who delivered it if you didn't?"

"Dr. Martin Juarez, in person," was the reply.

Lynne was puzzled. "I didn't know he was a doctor," she said.

"One of the finest," said Dr. Smetana with a wry smile. "It's his proud claim he never lost a calf, a foal, a kid or an egg. And now he's batting a *zwirchy* one thousand with a human birth."

"You mean—he's a veterinary?" Lynne asked incredulously. The idea that her child, the second human baby born on Mars, should have been delivered by an animal doctor was appalling. Then, suddenly, it was funny. Lynne laughed until tears again ran down her cheeks. Recovering, she gasped, "I want to see my baby."

Dr. Smetana had it wheeled alongside the plastomat in a jerry-built incubator. "Afraid we can't take him out yet," he said. "Got to make sure he's ready for the Martian atmosphere."

"I understand," said Lynne, turning her head to look at the bright red, tiny creature, asleep

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under its coverlet with its eyes squeezed tightly shut. *Did that come out of me?* she thought, in the immemorial self-question of all new mothers. She probed gently for its thought, caught a blanket of sleep, and knew she was going to love it and care for it as no mother on any planet had cared for her child.

"As a matter of fact, you gave Dr. Juarez a pretty bad time," said Dr. Smetana. "That boy of yours didn't want to leave at all."

"Then my neglect and carelessness these last few days didn't hurt?" asked Lynne, with relief. "I thought that bumpy ride with Joanna—was it yesterday?"

"The day before," said the doctor. "We've kept you under to give you some rest. As for that bumpy ride, it's a good thing you had it, or you might have been carrying that infant another month."

"You mean, I did my exercises too well?" Lynne asked.

"I mean, you didn't need to do them at all," was the reply, "although I'm beginning to believe they're a good idea for any mother-to-be. You and the boy have proved exactly what I *farbish* well hoped you'd prove, Lynne. Thanks to the increased density of atmosphere caused by E-power, Mars is safe for human birth."

He paused, then added, "Two swallows don't make a summer, of course, but I don't believe either your TP or Rana's had much to do with it."

"All that work wasted!" mourned Lynne as one of the Station girls, in a striped nurse's clout and bolero, wheeled the infant away.

"*Wasted!*" Dr. Smetana was indignant. "You and Rana have taken the biggest step forward since the first passenger ship landed on Mars. You've brought the planet out of a biological iron lung. When Dr. Juarez vidared me what was happening, I actually cheered."

"Where *is* Martin?" Lynne inquired. "I'd like to thank him."

"You can—later," said Dr. Smetana. "Right now, he's out on Patagonia Station, watching your husband hypnotize those goofy cows."

"Rolf!" she asked tremulously. "Rolf here? I thought I was only dreaming . . ."

"He wouldn't stir from your side until the infant was safely born," said the doctor. "He took the birth like a man—never so much as a whimper out of *him*. Then he got busy—*look!*" He nodded toward the big vidar screen on the opposite wall.

It was keyed to a Patagonia Station tower. Lynne stared at the picture, first with incomprehension, and then with admiration for the man she had married, the father of her child. Almost out of the screen were four small gleaming dots—humans in their aluminum climate-proof coveralls. They were clustered around a black cube that was the tri-di director. They were standing ankle-deep in snow!

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Facing them, as if polarized by some invisible magnet, was a great herd of Martian cattle. The animals were clustered close together, and were all looking directly at the projector. Rolf had done it, she thought with relief. He had converted her failure into triumph. The cleverness with which the possessed cattle avoided looking at the projector proved, to her satisfaction, that they were not strong enough to withstand the hypnosis directed at them.

"Who thought of using a snowstorm?" asked Lynne. "Was it—?"

"It was Rolf," said Dr. Smetana. "It seems he had been keeping in telepathic touch with your problem all the way from New Samarkand. When he got here, he simply gave the orders."

"That's the trouble with Earth-training," said Lynne. "I read somewhere that cattle always turn their backs on a snowstorm. But it didn't really register. I never saw cows, or steers outside of a zoo—until I got to Mars."

"We have all the disadvantages of Earth, here on Mars, Lynne," Dr. Smetana said, smiling. "Including, from now on, children. You get some rest now, and let me get a little. If you're restless think about your first PTA meeting. That should drop you off in a hurry."

IX

WHEN NEXT Lynne woke up, Rolf was there, his hair still wet with snow. Lynne's heart went out to him in a manner that left her, weak and spent as she was, aware that she had never been so glad to see anyone in her life, even the baby. His eyes were suspiciously moist.

"Well, my *zwirchy* darling," he said, "you went and did it."

"I'll have them bring the baby in," she said.

"I just had a look at him," Rolf told her. "I'm the proudest father on Mars." He lit a cigarette and handed it to her. Then he lit another for himself. "I don't know if you're marked 'Fragile, don't break' but I'd like very much to kiss you."

"Since when did you ever ask to kiss me—or any girl!" said Lynne, reaching for him.

"They couldn't hold me on Earth," said Rolf, standing up and exhaling twin plumes of smoke through his nostrils. "With you using the team on the cattle at Patagonia, I got the pickup on Earth. When you and Revere and Rana start TP'ing, the whole Solar System gets it. Wild *czanworms* couldn't have held me."

"But I flopped," said Lynne, feeling safe and comfortable and secure, merely having Rolf on the same planet with her. "You had to come up with the snowstorm idea."

Rolf grinned. "Didn't you ever see anyone come along and put the last piece in a jigsaw puzzle?" he asked.

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Lynne said, "Come back here." She held out her arms.

It was three full Mars-days later when Lynne, Rolf, the baby—whose name was, by unanimous decision, Martin Juarez Marcein—Revere Fenlay and Rana Willis flew back to Nampura Depot, with Rolf at the controls. The time had been employed, not only in preparing the infant for travel, but for testing and re-testing the processed cattle, until all were satisfied that the zombies' power had again been broken—this time, it was hoped, for good.

Revere Fenlay said, "I hope this does it for keeps."

Rolf replied, thoughtfully, "So do I. But I'd like to be sure they're safely contained in their new bodies."

"I'll never eat steak again," said Rana, shivering.

"Neither will I—without mushrooms," said Lynne. She looked backward, to check the baby, who was sleeping peacefully.

Rolf and Revere Fenlay raised their voices in the old Martian refrain, "There'll never be brisket on Mars. For that we must go to the stars. Give me some tablets with vitamin Q. If you don't like it, to Earthside with you!"

It was dark when they reached the Depot under a blazing Martian night sky that looked to Lynne definitely less spectacular than it had a mere Martian year before.

With the new baby safely asleep in his incubator, they crossed the hall to visit Rana and Tony Willis, leaving Revere and Lao Mei to watch the tot.

They found Tony up to his elbows in baby-suds in the bathroom. Regarding them fondly, he said, "Congratulations, Lynne. I hear you were tactful enough to provide Ranita with a future boy-friend."

"If I know kids," Rana said, "they probably won't speak to each other, except to bring down the other one's crushes."

"When were you ever a child?" Tony Willis asked.

"She's still a child," said Lynne. "And a truly *zwirchy* child, too. So stop kicking each other around."

"Well," said Tony, thoughtfully. "When I had the time, which was *farbish* seldom, I did miss the little character."

Rolf, who had appeared to be in a brown study, came out of it with, "You know, *czanworms,* we ought to help Tony out."

"Take over," said Tony, nodding toward the sink full of baby wash.

Rolf made a gesture of disdain. "Use your wits, man," he said. "You and I are going to pay a visit to New Samarkand. *On business.*"

"What business?" asked Tony.

Lynne and Rana, being TP's, were already laughing.

"What do you think?" Rolf asked. "We've got to get busy and start a diaper service. If you think I'm going through what *you've* been through for the last week, you're mad!"

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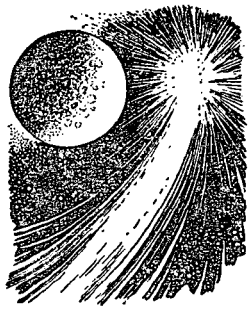

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eau de morgue

by . . . Arthur T. Harris

Vengeance can be very complete when it ends with a refrain to the tender lyric: "All of me!"

NOW THEN, where were we? Oh—we weren't; you didn't introduce yourself. To clear that up—I'm Jan Mystel. You are Detective Sergeant Kurt Milbach. And you're right. I *was* in a brawl last night!

Huh? You don't know anything about it? That isn't what you're here for? Just possibly I won't have to call a lawyer, Sarge. My conscience is reasonably clear, but heaven only knows what my subconscious has been up to!

You're asking me, did I know the Duchess of Dunscombe? I sure did, Pops, and the pleasure was all hers, if any. She was the rich, decrepit old biddy who dug up the loot for Madame Outre's store. I *had* to be polite.

You say *she*'s disappeared too? I hope it was prolonged and painful! No, I don't read the tabloids. It happened last night, eh? She just vanished—*pouf*! You checked her medicine chest at the Hotel Coq D'Or — nembutal, seconal, veronal, even a vial of methedrine. The ol' gal liked her kicks up and down, eh?

And also a four-ounce bottle of

Edgar Allan Poe was both a master of the detective story in its pioneering aspects and a superb science fiction writer. Witness THE NARRATIVE OF A. GORDON PYM. *Arthur T. Harris seems to have taken a leaf from the late genius of the high, pale brow and raven locks and presented us here with a science fantasy so chillingly unique that he has even dared to call it* EAU DE MORGUE, *in obvious tribute to Poe's* THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE. *Need we say more?*

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Madame Outre's Shangri-la Bath Salts. Cap off, empty, on the side of the bath tub. You made a chemical analysis of the residue—no dice. Still, it was the only link between Madame and the Duchess, if indeed it's any clue at all.

Sure, Sarge—I understand. You have got to milk every shred of evidence till the cow dries up. Okay. Pardon me while I shave and shower. I've got to catch an afternoon class today. Meanwhile I'll tell you what little I know . . .

About eight months ago, I finished a four-year hitch in the Air Force. I took my discharge pay, found this cold-water cubicle in the Village and moved in. Relaxed—and got to know half a dozen barkeeps. To give myself an objective I drifted into a little theater outfit, and signed up for a college course in radio-TV writing.

And ran out of dough.

One warm night I was coddling a beer at the Cote d'Azur. That's just off Sheridan Square, you know. The fellow who runs it, Mack Carr, used to fly with me in Korea. Well, I'm sour and disgusted with myself, see . . . and this group of five old biddies comes trooping in.

They're dressed and they talk and they act like Ladies' Day at the Vienna Opera, year eighteen ninety-three. All but one. She just smiles quietly, as though nursing happier memories. But it turns out she's the object of the gabfest.

After the initial cackling died down, I made out, from snatches of personal history, that the girls were interested in the damnedest things: the Russian philosopher Ouspenski, Yoga and yogurt, occult seances, strange gypsy herbs and potions.

I bought another beer and moved over to the next table.

It seems that the Duchess and Madame Outre had been friends in Budapest, before the war. Then Hitler upset the apple cart and the Duchess hurriedly married a British Embassy chap, name of Dunscombe. That gave her diplomatic immunity and when war came, she got out on a sealed train and wound up in London.

Not so the Madame. In Budapest she'd apparently presided over her own private seance, which was subsidized by the Hungarian elite. It was she who'd advised the future Duchess to wed the English diplomat. Anyway, Madame Outre eventually went to a concentration camp, and was down to eighty-five pounds at war's end.

Somehow she outwitted the Russians and got to Paris. There she fell in again with the Duchess, whose husband had taken a post-war Foreign Office job. The Duchess became her "sponsor," helped round up a new set of clients, and the old Budapest seance was revived.

Well, there's probably more to it than that. But about a year ago the Duke was shifted to a U.N. post here in New York, and

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the Duchess's entourage came along for the ride.

And that brings us up to date, to the Cote d'Azur, me with my warm beer and the old biddies gabbling away like mad and collecting a larger audience by the minute.

It seems that back in Budapest, Madame Outre had dabbled in perfumes, scented bath salts, and stuff like that for special friends. Now the girls, the Duchess in particular, were urging her to open a little shop in the Village. The Duchess up and proclaimed she'd be the bankroll.

You get the drift, Sarge. Here am I, half in the bag, in a boite full of characters, with impressionistic paintings on the walls, a "bulletin board" tacked up with personal notes, apartment-swap deals, little theater announcements, abused-car ads, old stove and refrigerator deals. Add to that Madison Avenue publicity boys in crew-cuts and charcoal suits; blonde nymphs in pony hair-dos and tight, oh very tight, suntan slacks; stevedores just off the docks; long-haired ex-G.I. art students—the whole gang, and the Budapest biddies to boot!

My ears must have been wagging like red flags at a rifle range when Madame Outre spoke up.

"*C'est fini,*" she said. "We shall have a shop, *oui. Parfums* from my own formulas, *oui.* And even, mayhap, a young man to assist during busy hours."

She lifted her martini toward me in an amiable toast. I must have blushed like a kid.

"Me and my big ears," I mumbled.

"We are a bunch of magpies," Madame Outre replied. "You could not help overhearing. Be so good as to join us, *s'il vous plait*!"

So-o-o . . . that's about it, Sarge. Just as casual as that. She offered me a part-time job, I accepted, and a week or so later we finished hammering up shelves, cleaning the fixtures, and setting out the stock.

We were in business.

At first, and of necessity, Madame had to buy from wholesale cosmetic and perfume houses. But after a month or so European chemicals, Bulgarian perfume oils et cetera began to come in. Madame had outfitted a little laboratory for herself, in the back, which was strictly "off limits." I typed out business correspondence, I banked checks and cash, and I waited on customers.

But only Madame had the key to the little back room.

Suspicious, Sarge? Hell's bells, man, I've *told* you the Madame trusted me. If she wished to dispense secret scents, and withhold certain trade formulas that was *her* business!

Okay, you're just trying to do your duty. We'll leave it at that. Pour me another coffee, huh? I'll be right out of the shower.

Thanks. So it goes along that way for about six months, Sarge. Until the Duchess of Dunscombe

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starts getting big ideas. It seems the Duchess started to drag some of her hoitiest-toitiest Continental friends down to the Village.

They didn't *shop* at Madame Outre's. They *patronized* her, and her customers. You know, the Village kids who work for ad agencies, weekly magazines, research organizations. In the office, they're cute. In the Village, they slip on dungarees and become part of the crowd.

Well, things began to get pretty sticky between the Duchess and Madame Outre. They came to a head—oh, about two weeks ago. I was in the storeroom, a little alcove in the rear adjoining Madame's laboratory.

Around five o'clock the Duchess came flouncing in. "My dear," she boomed, like a brass cannon, "my friends and I have decided you must—but you simply must—move uptown. To waste your time down here among silly little secretaries—ridiculous! Fantastic! I won't hear of it another moment!"

Madame kept calm. "You forget," she said, "that it was you who urged me to open up shop here. Since then I have found many new friends. I have become established. The Village is now part of my life."

"Nonsense!" the Duchess flared. "This is no 'life.' It is a humiliation to me and my friends! What began as a lark has turned into a travesty! You will move uptown, to the East Sixties, and next week. I have already chosen the store!"

Well, Sarge, the old gasbag was making so much noise that people outside began to hang around for the fun. I dropped my work, picked up some bottles and went up front, ostensibly to fill in stock on the shelves.

The Duchess glared at me, knowing perfectly well what I was up to. But she did lower her voice.

"Very well, then, my dear," she said—and so help me, Sarge, she didn't speak. She hissed! "You choose to abandon me, my aid, my patronage, my friends. *But if certain people were to learn about your background—!*" And like a witch's broom, she swept toward the door.

"A moment, please," Madame Outre said, so coolly the temperature seemed to drop.

The Duchess halted, and half turned. Quietly, her shoulders held stiff and proud, Madame Outre came out from behind the counter.

"We have known each other for years," she said. "Our long association makes it fitting that we part, if not as friends, then assuredly not as enemies. As the final act in our relationship I must beg you to accept from me a small but adequate gift. It will be mailed to you tonight."

Challenged to keep her temper, the Duchess smiled back. But her wide gray eyes were cold with hate.

"As you wish, my dear," she said. "As you wish."

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Satisfied, Sarge? Now look, I'm telling you. As soon as the Duchess took a powder, Madame Outre went to her laboratory, and was busy for about half an hour. Then she handed me a four-ounce jar of greenish bath salts—probably the same bottle you found by the Duchess's bath tub. So I wrapped it carefully, weighed it, stamped it and on my way home deposited it in the package mailbox on the corner.

Next morning—that was Saturday, about ten days ago—I found Madame's check for two weeks' pay in the mail. It didn't sound kosher, so I rushed over to the store—which she's failed to open, then or since. Monday I cashed the check. You traced me through her bank, eh?

No, of course I didn't go to the police! Madame wanted to do a quiet fadeout, and that's her business. The trouble with this country is—too many amateur snoops are on the warpath.

So that's all there is, Sarge. And until you mentioned it, I never made any mental connection between Madame's disappearance and the Duchess's vanishing act. How could I ,when you only told me a half hour ago? Come again. You say there's dirty work at the crossroads?

Sure, I'll buy. I'm morally certain nobody did Madame Outre in. She simply up and took off. As for the Duchess, anything that old battleax got she deserved—provided there's a *corpus delicti,* a body. But there isn't. You said so yourself.

So how in hell—

What? You *did* find something? A three-carat diamond wedding ring, which the Duke insists she never removed from her finger—not even when she bathed? You found it in the bathroom, eh? Okay. So maybe, just this once, she took it off before she toweled herself, or whatever rich dames do when they want to rub clean.

So she left it on the washstand. Oh—she didn't? You mean, there was evidence she'd taken a bath, had finished, pulled the plug, let out the water, and then stood up to dry herself?

Let's get this straight. The Duchess disappeared last night. The story is in today's papers. Okay. She was probably taking a bath—check. She used the soap in the soap dish, and there was a damp towel lying by the side of the tub. Plug drawn. The cops are called in, and go snooping for clues. They find her big diamond ring—huh? Not on the washstand, but wedged sideways against the metal stopper inside the open drain?

Okay! So she got too much soap on her hands. The ring worked loose and got lost, and she failed to notice it was missing. Then she dried herself, got dressed and slipped out to visit some of her rich oddball pals . . .

Huh? You say the Duke had to call hotel help to break down the bathroom door? You say that he

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was in their living-room when he heard a half scream, and came running? Then a funny gurgle, as of water leaving the tub. And then . . . *nothing?*

And when the bellhops broke in, no Duchess? Only the ring, which you people found later? And the open, empty bottle of Madame Outre's bath salts, which your chemists couldn't analyze?

You mean—Sarge, you mean you think there's a possibility she soaked herself in those bath salts, pulled the plug, stood up to towel herself and then began to dissolve —and went down the drain?

Oh, my God!

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the gay-hearted jay

by . . . Dal Stivens

A bluejay and a nightingale may seem to have little in common. But the song that makes the wide world spin is a song of sharing.

A GAY-HEARTED jay had the misfortune to fall in love with a rather vain nightingale.

"What, marry you?" cried the nightingale, tossing her head. "With all that chatter you make I'd never be able to hear myself think!"

An owl who was flying past gave a dry hoot of laughter. "Old sour face!" said the nightingale. She turned back to the jay. "Learn not to gabble so much and you might stand a chance—though I'm not promising."

The jay, who had kept silent by a great effort of will all this time, protested, "But I must chatter! There is so much to babble about! Why, the sun is shining, the sky is blue and the woods are full of acorns! I gabble from a full heart! The stream is running, the clouds are flying, the world is beautiful, life is so full, so rich! Only a stone could keep silent! I love you dearly but I should never be able to keep from chattering. It's my nature!"

He stopped to draw breath and the nightingale cut in with, "Those

And here he is again, OUR *inimitable fabulist Dal Stivens, with a talking animal tale that Aesop himself would have chuckled over. We've put that "our" in prideful capitals because Mr. Stivens has become by now something of a* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE *institution. We hasten to point out, however, that we don't mean the massive granite kind of institution at all. We mean the kind that floats in elfin splendor through "fantasy's bright domain untarnished."*

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are my terms but I'm not promising." Then she flew up, lightheartedly, singing to meet the sun.

The jay felt so sad when she left him that he was silent for a full minute during which he made a vow that he would cultivate silence. He flew off the pine branch on which the conversation with the nightingale had taken place and took wing into the woods. He had flown about fifty yards when he had an idea.

"Perhaps if I were to carry something in my beak, I should be able to keep my mouth shut," he said aloud. "I have it! I should carry an egg because if I opened my mouth, it would fall and surely break."

But how to get an egg became a problem. None of the other birds to whom the jay put his proposal would agree to part with one of theirs.

"Certainly not!" they said. "Trust an egg to such a gabble-pate. Ask your wife for one of her eggs."

This made the jay so sad that he chattered little in the next half hour.

"Sadness is obviously the cure for me," he said. He was on his way to acquaint the nightingale of his discovery when he came on a heap of glittering wheat. The jay immediately burst into a song that lasted for several minutes. At the end of it, he exclaimed suddenly, "Oh dear, I shall never win the nightingale's affections. It gets more and more hopeless but what can I do when the world is so wonderful a place to live in!"

He had barely said these words when a fowler's net descended on him. The jay was taken out by the fowler, put in a cage and taken to the nearby town and then to the city. He was very frightened and sad and said not a word but put his beak under his right wing. Indeed, his heart was so full with the misfortune that had overtaken him that it was not until several days later when he found himself in a cage in a bird shop that the full irony of his situation made itself known to him.

"I have been silent enough for days now to win the nightingale's heart," he mourned. "But what good is such silence now? She whom I love is free in the forest and I am shut in this cage!"

And the jay sighed deeply and put his beak in his wing. Suddenly he heard a voice calling to him: "Please chatter to me! I feel so unhappy!"

In the cage next to him was the nightingale. When he saw his beloved imprisoned like himself, the jay's heart almost broke with sorrow.

"Tell me about the forest and the trees," pleaded the nightingale. "Tell me about the sun and the blue sky and the beautiful world."

The jay began to chatter, brokenly at first, but more strongly as he recalled the happy days he had known. He told of the stream running, of the clouds flying, of the

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world outside so full and rich. But though he chattered for half an hour the nightingale remained disconsolate and the generous-hearted jay was spurred to greater efforts and tried to remember everything that had made him happy and when he had jabbered for a further half hour, the nightingale said:

"Kind jay, you have made me feel better. I shall sing for you."

She opened her beak and began. She sang sweetly but with such poignancy that passers-by stopped to listen. Among them was an old man who when he heard her cried: "That nightingale is singing from a broken heart!" and immediately went into the shop, with tears in his eyes, and bought her at an exorbitant price, took her outside, and released her.

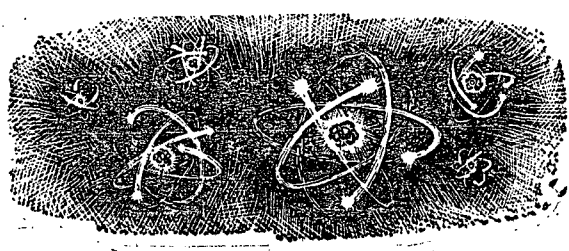
"Return to your forests, little bird!" said the old man.

The nightingale flew off the old man's hand, high into the air, spiralling towards the sun, while she poured out her heart in thankfulness. She had not gone very high, however, before she remembered the jay and flew back and perched on a chimney pot outside the bird shop.

The kind-hearted jay, meanwhile, had tried to chatter his joy at his beloved's good fortune, but so hoarse was he that only raucous sounds emerged. These were so horribly discordant that the bird shop man became exasperated, took the cage outside and released the jay, crying: "Go! Your voice is too ugly for anyone to love!"

His wife protested at his action, regretting the profit they had lost on the sale of the jay, but the man greeted her with: "No matter! We have made a handsome profit on the nightingale from that old fool."

The jay and the nightingale flew off home together. They made quite a successful marriage. Suffering had mellowed the nightingale's heart, and as for the jay, he was almost as gay as ever, but when his chatter seemed likely to get on his wife's nerves, he went deep into the woods and gabbled away, telling himself how fortunate he was, until he was hoarse.



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the death wish

by . . . Margaret St. Clair

They were very charming people—make no mistake. They liked games and were hospitable to a fault. What, then, was out of joint?

THE FREEWAY opened broad and exciting in front of them. With the top of the turndown back, the air was stingingly brisk against their faces. The sky overhead was a brilliant, deep, cloudless blue. It was a fine day to be going to a football game.

"Isn't this nice?" Anne said. "Perfect weather, just the right amount of traffic on the road to make things interesting, and we're going to a football game. It couldn't be better. Everything is always just the way it ought to be, in this place." She pulled the collar of her gray fur coat up around her face and looked at him smilingly. But her eyes were challenging.

"Um," Paul said. He did not look at her or turn around even slightly.

Anne lowered her eyes. She laid her hand over his, on the steering rod, and pressed his knuckles. He did not respond, and after a moment she drew her hand away.

"Paul, what's the matter? Why don't you— What makes you act like that?"

Astoundingly enough, the idea behind this unforgettable little science fantasy is one which might have occurred to almost anyone. Yet we doubt if it ever has —at least with quite the same St. Clairian insight into the eternity-long loneliness of one man and one woman shipwrecked on a strange planet in space. It's a little like Shiel's PURPLE CLOUD, *in a way, that fearful chronicle of one man alone on Earth. But Margaret St. Clair has a magic wand all her own, and she doesn't need the wide, spreading canvas of a full-length novel to set it aglow.*

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"I think you know why," he answered, still not turning.

Anne drew in her breath. "Oh, are you still harping away on that? Can't you see you're wrong? It wasn't the way you thought it was at all. You're wrong. Paul, you're wrong. We're lucky to be comfortable and safe, lucky to be alive at all. Don't you realize that it was only by a kind of miracle that we landed on this wonderful planet? If you'd just stop to think—"

"It's not a wonderful planet," Paul interrupted. "It's a very strange one."

"It's not strange at all," Anne retorted. Her face seemed to have relaxed a little. "It's almost exactly like Earth."

The turndown shot smoothly ahead on the long, broad road. Paul said, "And if you think that isn't strange, Anne, you're refusing to face facts.

"We landed, by accident—" his voice faintly stressed the last two words—"on the surface of the planet of a sun on the other side of Sirius. It was a crash landing. We couldn't have gone anywhere else.

"We found that the planet was not only very similar to Earth physically, but that it was populated by some two million human beings. The only noticeable way in which they differ from the population of Terra is that they all have white skins.

"Their material culture is almost identical with that of Terra thirty years ago. The layout of their cities, their vehicles, their books—everything. They even have football games, with the nineteen-ninety rules. The one difference I've been able to locate so far is that they have no approach to space flight. They hardly seem to have thought of it. They tell me positively that our own ship can never be repaired. And that, from a culture as advanced technologically as this one, is in itself queer.

"But the queerest thing of all is that they speak English perfectly. Their books and papers and journals are written in it. We land, by accident—" again his voice accented the last two words—"on a planet on the other side of Sirius. Its inhabitants have no idea of space flight, but they speak English as their mother tongue. This is a wonderful planet, Anne, certainly. But isn't it a little *queer*?" He turned his gaze from the road to peer at her triumphantly.

Anne pleated her lower lip. "Yes, when you put it like that. But you see, Paul, there's another way of looking at it."

She paused, seeming to arrange her thoughts. "I read once, somewhere, that there are ten million million planets like Earth in what we know of space. Ten million million planets, and billions of years of time. If you have chances enough, anything, no matter how improbable, becomes possible. Like the monkeys writing the Encyclopaedia Britannica out perfectly on

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typewriters. I think that's what has happened here."

Paul laughed. His lean, sunburned face had grown cheerful. "I don't believe it," he declared. "No matter how many monkeys, how many typewriters, how much banging. I just don't believe it. What edition of the Encyclopaedia? Uh—Here's the parking lot."

IT WAS A good game, stubbornly fought by both sides, with fast, brilliant plays that got everybody in the stadium up on his feet and yelling. The Blues won. On the way home, Anne asked, "Are you feeling better now, Paul?"

"Um?"

"I mean, more able to accept things. To be happy that we're honored guests here, and not worry so much."

He turned toward her momentarily. His face was dark; it seemed she had mistaken his mood. "If you mean by that, that I've forgotten what I saw, the answer is no. Still no."

"*Don't* start that again, Paul."

He cleared his throat. "I can't forget that I went aft on the BRAHE," he said deliberately, "and found you wreaking assorted havoc with a monkey wrench. You'd already smashed up the steering gear hopelessly. If I hadn't gone in just then, God knows what else you'd have wrecked."

"It wasn't—Paul, you're wrong. It just wasn't that way."

"It wasn't that way? You mean I was having a hallucination? What way was it, then?"

Anne was silent. At last she made a gesture of despair, her hands palely luminous in the gathering dusk. "But what—why can't you forget it? We're here. We're safe. We can't get away, but they let us have everything we want. They want us to live off the fat of the land. Why can't you be satisfied? What is it, anyway?"

He turned toward her, taking one hand from the steering rod. "I can't be satisfied," he said slowly, "until I know why you wanted the BRAHE wrecked here. *Why did you want us to spend the rest of our lives here?*"

He turned back to the road. His foot pressed down hard on the accelerator. The turndown shot ahead.

Anne said, "It's cold. We ought to have put the top up. Paul, don't you think you ought to turn the lights on? It's getting dark."

His only answer was to step down on the accelerator with all his strength.

"Be careful," Anne said anxiously. "This is no place to try to pass. It's dark, and—Paul! *Paul!* . . . Look out! There's a car coming! Get back! Paul! Oh, my God!"

They weren't hurt. They weren't even scratched. The oncoming car had, at the last moment, turned back into its own lane and crashed into the car ahead of it, to avoid hitting them.

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The cops came bobbing up on motorcycles, nearly a dozen of them, and then an ambulance that took the injured from the other two cars away. They took Paul away too—a little later.

Anne did not see him for three days after that, when he came back to the hotel where they were staying, after the hearing about the accident had been held.

"I'm a free man," he said. He looked around the room—he and Anne, as honored guests, were occupying a luxury suite in the hotel—and said rather absently, "Everything seems different somehow, as if I'd been gone a long time."

"How was jail?" Anne asked. After the first greeting she had hung back from him, in what looked like embarrassment or lack of ease.

"Not bad. Lonesome. I had a cell all to myself. The population here must be remarkably law-abiding. I don't believe there was anyone at all besides myself in the jug."

"Would you like something to eat?" She went over to a low tabouret and began rearranging the flowers in a vase on it.

"No, thanks, they fed me. Pretty good food." He sat down on the big green divan, his long legs stretched out in front of him. "Anne, did you get the force of what I said when I first came in? I'm a free man."

"I know. I'm glad." She did not turn from her work with the flowers.

"Yes, but—Anne, it's incredible. I'm responsible for the death of three men. That came out clearly enough at the hearing. And do you know what they did? They slapped a fine on me, which was remitted because I didn't have any money. And they gave me six months in jail, on a suspended sentence. In other words, no punishment at all. And yet I killed three men."

"We're honored guests," Anne said slowly. "They wouldn't want to do anything that would make us unhappy."

"Yes. But this is going too far."

"How do we know? It obviously isn't going too far, for them. How do we know what the rules are here? We can't expect them to act the way we would. They must have different rules."

"Yes, I suppose that's it—the rules are different." His face did not clear. "They must be quite a bit different."

Anne went over and sat down by him on the divan. "You were gone three days," she said. "It was lonely. There wasn't any news about what was happening to you. Kiss me, Paul."

He kissed her. "I wish I knew why—"

"Always you want to know why," she said teasingly. "Forget it. Kiss me again."

His arms tightened around her. Lightly she caressed the muscles

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of his back. She was smiling. "Sweetheart. *Paul.*"

But he awoke in the night, his anxiety still unsatisfied. It was something about the accident, something he couldn't remember, and it was bothering him.

Anne was sleeping quietly beside him. He got up and went over to the windows—softly, so that he should not disturb her.

The suite Paul and his wife occupied was high up in the hotel. When he looked out, he could see nearly the whole length of the street. The time was not much past midnight, but the street was almost deserted. The population, it seemed, was not only law-abiding but went to bed early. Then, as Paul watched, two cars started from opposite ends of the street, passed each other in the middle, and turned the corners again.

There were cars and a scattering of pedestrians after that. Paul watched absently, his hands on the fastenings of the window, until his feet grew cold. Then he went back to bed. But as he slid gently between the covers he knew suddenly what had been bothering him about the accident. *There hadn't been any blood.*

After that, Paul made experiments. A bellhop brought him a drink. Paul put out his foot and tripped him, and the man righted himself and went back to the bar without ever a word.

He got a cigar from the girl at the tobacco counter in the hotel. When she stooped to replace the cigar box on the lower shelf, he pulled three bright ornaments from the back of her hair. She did not even straighten up. There were other experiments. He climaxed them with what he did to the plumber in the bath.

Anne was in the habit of washing her long blonde hair in the shower, and that may have been what made the drain stop up. The plumber said so when Paul, leaning against the bathroom door with his hands in his pockets, questioned him. He seemed to be a good plumber. He went about his work neatly and efficiently.

Paul looked on lazily while the man probed in the drain with a length of flexible metal hose and poured a can of some caustic cleaner into it. He waited until the man bent over to see what was happening in the depths of the drain. Then he picked up a heavy wrench from the plumber's open kit of tools.

For a moment he hesitated. What he was about to do frightened him. But after all, he was nearly sure. He hefted the wrench. He hit the plumber as hard as he could on the back of the head with it.

The plumber fell forward into the shower stall. He did not groan, or kick, or move. Paul took hold of him by the shoulder and tried to turn him over. He was much heavier than Paul had anticipated. When he got him over on his

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back, Paul saw that a long spiral of copper wire was protruding from the man's nose.

Paul went into the bedroom, where Anne was fixing her nails with a little electric manicure tool. Above the noise the tool made, he said, "We're the only living people on this planet."

"What? Sorry, I didn't hear what you said."

He reached out and shut the manicure tool off. "I said, we're the only living people on this planet."

"Oh. I—oh."

"Yes. Come and look." He led her into the bathroom and showed her the fallen plumber.

"Oh," she said once more. She began rubbing one cheek as if it had grown numb and she wanted to start the blood tingling in it.

"You don't seem very surprised," he said, looking at her.

"I'm not, Paul. You see, I've thought so for quite a long time."

"How long?"

"Oh—since before the accident."

His face relaxed. "What made you guess?" he asked.

"A lot of things. They were always a little slow about answering questions or doing things, especially if one behaved in an unexpected way. I wasn't sure, though—until I went down the stairs one day instead of waiting for the elevator, and found two of the maids oiling each other on the stair landing."

"Why didn't you tell me?" he wanted to know.

"I thought it might frighten you or make you unhappy. You see, we're stuck here for the rest of our lives, and— *Does* it make you unhappy, Paul?"

"It's a funny feeling," he said. He had put his hands back in his pockets. "There's traffic down in the street—I can hear the noise of the horns even in here. But . . . I suppose there are cities all over this world that would spring into life as we entered them, and go back to immobility and silence as soon as we left them. Or do they keep running all the time? That would use a good deal of power.

"Yes, I think I *am* afraid. It's frightening."

She went over to him and touched his arm. "Don't you see now, Paul, that your suspicions were wrong? I wasn't trying to wreck the ship so that we'd land on this planet. Nobody would want to live all his life with robots, dear."

"No."

"But—can't we be happy? You said once that you'd like to be alone with me on a desert island, that you'd like to spend your life alone with just me. Well—this is a desert island de luxe. Anything we want, we can have. Can't we be happy, dear?"

"What about when we get old? When we get old and die?"

She took him in her arms almost fiercely. "We won't die! We won't! And we won't be old for a long,

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long time. Paul, sweetheart! Say you can be happy here."

"All right. Yes."

THEY MOVED into the control tower, high above the city. Paul liked to shut off the automatic controls and direct the activities of the robots himself. Sometimes he would produce a monstrous traffic jam, or crumple fenders in a series of minor wrecks. At least it provided entertainment.

He and Anne made trips to the robot factories, or, later, drove through the country and watched towns and cities come alive when they entered and sink back quiet when they left again. Paul spent a good deal of his time going over the papers Wilkenson had left.

"What do you suppose the old boy was like?" he said to Anne one day over highballs in the control tower. They were both drinking more than they once had. "Personally, I mean."

"He must have hated people," Anne answered. "Hated them and feared them and needed them. He couldn't get along with the real world. So he came here and made a world he could control."

"Yes. He must have been like that. And with a brilliant, brilliant intellect. Some of his mathematical stuff makes me feel like an infant. I can't even tell what his equations are aiming at. A big-brained cyberneticist. And a man with great organizing ability, too . . . I wonder how old he was when he came here. And how old he was when he died."

"Don't the papers tell?"

"No. Most of the time they aren't dated. And they're thoroughly mixed up. Listen, Anne." He cleared his throat. "Where do you go in the afternoons?"

"In the afternoons? Nowhere. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, yes you do. Twice lately you've said you were going to your room to lie down. But when I went looking for you, you were not there."

"Oh, that." She laughed. "Now I remember. My headache got better and I went shopping. It's such fun to make the robots bring out everything in the stores."

"I don't believe it. You weren't in any stores."

Anne emptied her glass. "Paul, are you starting in on that stuff again?" she said when she put it down. "Suspicions—all that old stuff?"

"I can't forget what I saw you doing with that wrench."

She got up from her chair and walked over to one of the control tower's enormous windows. "I won't talk to you until you stop that, Paul," she said.

He kept after her with questions, but she remained silent. He needed her too much to endure her being angry with him. In the end, he begged her pardon and promised that he would ask her no more questions. He kept his word.

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But he took to watching her more closely than before.

She went out in the afternoons—that was the gist of his observations. Once or twice he tried to follow her, but she seemed to know immediately that he was on her heels, and took care to turn into a convenient store.

He didn't know what to do. His suspicions were too tormenting for him to be able to lay them aside. For a while he thought of trying to re-wire one of the control boards so that the three dimensional map that represented the city's street traffic would indicate, by a moving red dot, where Anne was.

But the control boards were enormously complicated. The task was too difficult for him to undertake. In the end he called in two robots at random from the street and told them to follow Anne. The next day he summoned two others, and so on.

Her shopping trips continued. But at the end of nearly a week his current spies came in to tell him that Anne had entered a building at 304 Shenandoah Street. The address was a long way from the center of the city, so there could be no question of shopping. Presumably she was still there.

He drove there in the turndown. 304 Shenandoah was a low, pleasant little building, not quite a dwelling house, with vines growing on it. Paul sat before it in the turndown for a moment, trying to collect himself. His legs were shaking badly. Then he got out.

There was lettering on the door of 304 Shenandoah. It read, "Dr. L. J. Sutter, Physician and Surgeon. Hours 2 to 5."

Paul felt a relief so acute that it sickened him. So *that* was it. Anne wasn't well—she had mentioned her headaches herself—and she had been going to a physician for help. She hadn't told him about it because she didn't want to worry him. Going to a doctor was a normal thing to do. He felt ashamed of himself for having suspected her.

He was about to get back in the turndown when it struck him. *This* doctor was a robot. How could he help a flesh-and-blood woman?

Paul's suspicions reawoke instantly. He walked up the steps of 304 Shenandoah and into the waiting room. There were three or four patients sitting there. They looked up at him with the slightly mechanical, slightly too slow motions of the neck he had come to associate with Wilkenson's robots. He went past them into the suite of rooms at the back.

The nurse came out and tried to stop him. He pushed her aside. Anne wasn't in the consulting room proper, or in a little office to the side. He found her at the rear of the building, in a big, well-lighted room that looked like a surgery.

She was sitting on an examining table, naked to the waist. There was a black, rectangular hole between her breasts. A flesh-colored

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rectangular plate lay beside her on the table. Dr. Sutter was bending over her intently, doing something to the connections within her body with a screw driver.

There was an instant's silence, while the two by the examining table looked at him frozenly. Then Paul spoke to his wife. "So you're one of them," he said.

They were sitting side by side on the green settee in the control room. They had been talking for nearly an hour. Early in the discussion the robot who had been Anne had asked Paul whether he wanted her to tell him the truth, or to say what it would make him happy to hear.

And when he had answered her passionately that he wanted the truth, she had replied, "One cannot, of course, judge your sincerity. One's basic imperative—the basic imperative Wilkenson built into all his robots—is that a human being must never be caused suffering. But all one can do is to take you at your word."

"Why do you say 'one'?" he had asked her.

"A robot cannot truthfully say 'I.'"

He had learned a good deal in the discussion. Anne had been Wilkenson's masterpiece, the most perfect, most human robot he had ever designed. He had grown attached to her and when, growing old, he had felt an uncontrollable longing for the human beings he had rejected and feared—he had wanted to die among his own kind—he had taken Anne with him when he started back to Earth.

He had died not long after his arrival on Terra, and Anne had been thrown on her own resources. She had met Paul and he had wanted to marry her. She had realized the difficulties of marriage with him, but her built-in, basic imperative would not let her refuse.

"Didn't you ever feel anything?" Paul had wanted to know.

"Feel?" robot-Anne had answered so blankly that he knew the answer to his question. ". . . Once one heard a human woman say that men are easy to fool."

"I wish it hadn't been fooling," Paul had said with controlled bitterness.

"Yes, one can wish that there had been no need to fool."

Paul got up from the settee and poured himself another drink. The sun had set and outside the windows of the control tower the sky was beginning to get dark.

"Why did you want to come here, though?" he asked with the glass in his hand. "Why did you want to wreck the ship?"

"There was no wish to wreck the ship," the robot who had been Anne answered.

She spoke without moving. Since Paul had discovered what she was, she had abandoned all her human mannerisms, and her voice had lost its variety of intonation and pitch.

"I saw you with the wrench."

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"Yes." She seemed to arrange her words. "You must understand," she said, her words perfectly spaced, "that it is a very great strain for a robot to behave as a human being constantly. Even for such a complex robot as the one here. One grows very tired."

"Go on."

"You must not be caused pain. One knew that. That was the great imperative. But—"

"You felt hostility?"

"Not hostility. A wish for peace. For rest. One knew one's machinery was wearing out. Yet you must not be caused pain. So one suggested that you buy the BRAHE and travel into this part of the Galaxy."

"And then you wrecked the ship."

"There was no wish to wreck the ship," robot-Anne said for the second time. "One wanted help, to have one's mechanical strains repaired; and so one suggested that you come near to this planet, where the help could be had."

"You wanted to come here so you could have a mechanic work on you?" Paul said crudely. The words hurt him as he spoke.

"Yes. One thought such help could be had only here."

"I still don't see why you were trying to wreck the ship."

"There was no wish to wreck the ship," the robot who had been his wife said. She said it in exactly the same flat, mechanical tone she had said it twice before. "One had a conflict between one's imperative and one's wish for complete rest.

"By the time you saw what you saw with the wrench, the conflict had grown acute. One could endure it no longer. One had to have rest."

"You tried to get it by killing us both?"

"Not—no." She was speaking just a trifle more rapidly than she had been. "One had heard that the rear cabin of the ship could be detached from the rest of the ship in case of emergency."

"That's true. But it's a couple of hours for a man with burning torches and welding guns."

"One did not understand about that. One mistook the nature of the steering gear."

"You mean you were trying to detach the rear cabin and— I still don't get it."

"One believed you would be safe, in the forward cabin. One thought the ship would still function. There was no wish for your harm. There was never any wish for your harm."

"But what would have happened to you in the after cabin?"

"One believed the cabin would crash on the surface of the planet.

"There is a switch on the right side of one's head just above the ear. That stops the machinery. One could not bring oneself to turn it. But one had to have rest."

"You were trying to kill yourself," Paul said flatly.

"A robot cannot die. But if one were a human woman, the answer would be 'Yes.'"

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He turned on the lights in the control tower and sat down beside her, the almost empty glass still in his hand.

"Do you want one to continue talking?" she asked after a moment.

"Yes."

She went on then in her flat voice, adding details, explaining, making it all clear. Her eyes were closed against the light. Paul looked intently at her face.

When she paused momentarily, he said, "Do you still have that same—death wish?"

"Do you want to hear the truth?" she asked.

He noticed that she had stopped using his name. He licked his lips. "Yes," he said.

She seemed to try for speech. At last she just nodded her head.

It was the first time she had moved anything except her lips since they had come back to the control tower. Her eyes were still closed. Her beautiful blonde hair lay softly around her smooth forehead.

Paul looked at her a little longer. If there had been anything at all in her face—sorrow, guilt, remorse, anything—he could have stood it. He would have asked her to go on living.

There was nothing at all. She would never cry, she would smile only because she thought he wanted her to. He put the empty glass down on the floor. Gently, almost tenderly, he reached out toward the right side of her head and turned the switch.

Time-track miracles are all too rare! But one is occurring at this very moment—a guest-appearance, entertainment shift from science fantasy to mystery by a science fantasy great! Running parallel with this month's FANTASTIC UNIVERSE *you'll find—in the current* SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE—*a brand new crime story by Isaac Asimov,* THE DEATH OF A HONEY-BLONDE. *And what a yarn it is!*

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universe in books

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Our critic's monthly survey of science fantasy with a bookman's trident celebrates the arrival of space travel without space opera.

HAROLD LELAND GOODWIN, Director of Atomic Test Operations for the Federal Civil Defense Administration, takes up problems and ideas which undoubtedly will affect all our lives in his authoritative revised THE SCIENCE BOOK OF SPACE TRAVEL (Pocket Books, 35 cents), originally published by Franklin Watts.

This is Space Travel *without* the Space Opera!

Goodwin reports, smoothly but without sugar coating, on the realities and the weird logic that is and will be an integral part of Space Travel, including discoveries which may reasonably be anticipated on the forty-five worlds — planets, moons and asteroids—in our own Solar System. In Goodwin's opinion—future colonists take note—"the worlds of space hold little promise for space travelers. They are mostly cold, and probably lifeless—of interest only to the scientist. The chances of discovering great new sources of minerals seem slim. The minerals may be there, but in most cases they would not be accessible."

Science fantasy in its more prophetic aspects gains immeasurably in depth and significance when it pays strict attention to what is taking place in the laboratory. And we don't mean a laboratory set up on Mars in the twenty-seventh century. We're thinking of the sound scientific advances and sober realistic appraisals that are taking place right now. A look at the future which ignores such advances may be a 'curtain raiser.' But Mr. Santesson prefers 'right now.'

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And what of the Unidentified Flying Objects?

In 1952 there were over one thousand sightings. Goodwin states flatly that *"there is no known way of explaining two hundred of the sightings in this one year."* (Author's italics.) As he correctly points out, "twenty percent is an enormous figure. It cannot be ignored." Unless we prefer to hide our heads in the sand.

And obviously it isn't ignored. The author quotes A. G. Karpenko, secretary of a committee formed by the Soviet Academy of Sciences "to coordinate space travel research" as saying that one of the Russian objectives in *their* satellite project is to study the problems of "future communications with space ships."

To quote author Goodwin: "The age of space is here, and manned space flight may be no more than a few years ahead."

FREDERIK POHL explores a mildly disturbing future in ALTERNATING CURRENTS (Ballantine Books, 35 cents), a group of stories that do not promise us much peace or greater understanding in that sometimes uncomfortably near future.

The name of Frederik Pohl must, of course, figure prominently in any account of contemporary science fiction, Pohl having contributed considerably to the field —as a fan, as an agent, as an anthologist and as a writer, on his own and in collaboration with Cyril Kornbluth.

Much of the wry cynicism and the blandly ironic glint found in the eyes of Pohl-plus-Kornbluth is absent in these stories by Frederik Pohl, but they are interesting and even challenging ideas. One or two of them are even frightening ideas. There is a very natural temptation to wonder what two or three mutual friends would have done with the same ideas, but there is no denying that ALTERNATING CURRENTS is interesting.

ATTENTION, West Coast readers! Richard Matheson will be guest of honor at the Ninth Annual West Coast Science-Fiction Conference which will be held at the Hotel Leamington, in Oakland, California, on June 30th and July 1st. This is, as you undoubtedly know, one of the biggest events of the year for Science-Fiction writers and fans on the West Coast. For further information, contact Marilyn Tulley, Chairman, 1956 WESTERCON, 432 23rd Avenue, Oakland 6, California.

The chances are that some of you will not realize that Frank Herbert's THE DRAGON IN THE SKY (Doubleday, $2.95) *is* Science Fiction—something that can be said about more than one borderline book in the genre. But the publishers assure us that here is "an edge-of-the-chair science-fiction novel of underwater warfare in

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which psychology is as important a weapon as atomics." America and her allies have been raiding the enemy's huge underwater oil deposits. The subtug *Fenian Ram S1881* is the 21st raider to be sent out. Ensign Ramsey is on board not only to trap a potential saboteur, but to see to it—if he can—that the *Fenian Ram* will not be the 21st raider to be detected and destroyed by the enemy. Recommended—as a suspense novel!

"The technological race for aerial supremacy has spurred the air research and development effort to ever increasing strides. But the spectacular results of this effort have focused attention," to quote Lt. Gen. T. S. Power, USAF, Commander, Air Research and Development Command, "on the new aircraft, missiles, components, and techniques, rather than on the men who have created them." Lloyd Mallan fills the long-felt need for the story of these men in his excellent MEN, ROCKETS AND SPACE RATS (Julian Messner, $5.95), with an introduction by Lt. Gen. T. S. Power. Mallan tells "the human side of the story behind some of the great contributions to aeronautics during the past decades."

In addition to identifying Moby Dick, Mallan reports on the achievements of scientists like the men at Sacramento Peak and the others working in the Department of Space Medicine, School of Aviation Medicine—and still others who are making their contributions to this dramatic story. Pioneers like Professor Clyde Tombaugh, discoverer of the Planet Pluto; Lt. Col. Frank Everest who flies the Bell X-2, a rocket aircraft designed to reach five times the speed of sound; Lt. Col. John Paul Stapp, who sped along the ground at 632 miles per hour, and then braked to a stop in less than one and a half seconds. Men also like Majors Kit Murray, Chuck Yeager and Harold Russell, not to mention Lt. Col. Jack Ridley, "profoundly intelligent pilots, dedicated to improving the performance of new high-speed and high-flying aircraft."

And there is Colonel Homer Boushey, Chief of Staff at Wright Air Development Center, who is quoted as saying: "I'd hazard a guess that we'll have space flight in about twenty years. For a long period it may be done without men, but eventually a man will fly in a spacegoing vehicle."

Recommended.

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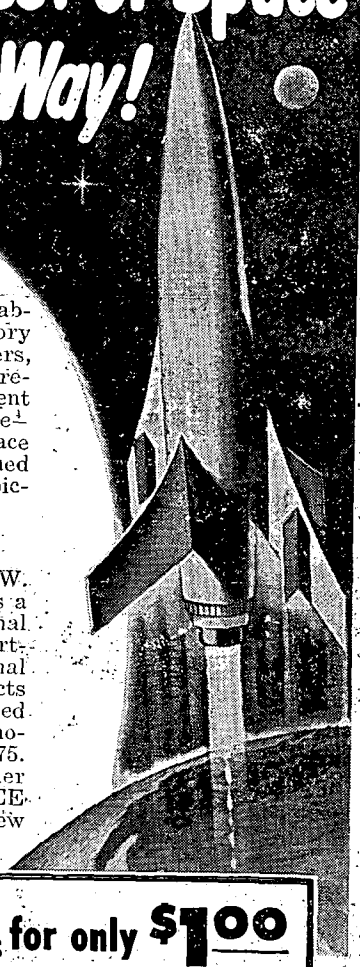

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